

Psalms

Summary: *Psalm 1 serves as the gateway to the entire Psalter, establishing the fundamental contrast that runs through all 150 psalms: the way of the righteous versus the way of the wicked. It is a wisdom psalm that draws its categories directly from the torah tradition, presenting life as a binary choice between two paths with two destinies.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This psalm contains no prayer, no praise, no lament — it is pure instruction. Its placement at the head of the Psalter transforms the entire collection from a hymnbook into a curriculum. The reader is told before singing a single song: the person who meditates on the LORD's instruction day and night will flourish. The Psalter begins not with worship but with the demand to study. The tree metaphor in verse 3 is not decorative but structural — a tree planted by water channels does not choose to bear fruit; it bears fruit because of where it is rooted. Location determines outcome. The righteous person's fruitfulness is not achievement but consequence.*

Translation Friction: *The Hebrew ashre ('happy, blessed, fortunate') that opens the psalm is not a blessing pronounced by God but a declaration of observed reality — closer to 'how fortunate is' than 'blessed be.' The psalm's sharp binary between righteous and wicked leaves no room for moral ambiguity, which reflects wisdom literature's tendency toward clean categories. Real life is messier, and the rest of the Psalter — especially the lament psalms — will complicate this tidy framework considerably.*

Connections: *The opening word ashre links Psalm 1 to Psalm 2:12 ('ashre kol chose vo,' 'happy are all who take refuge in him'), forming a literary bracket around the paired introduction to the Psalter. The tree-by-water image echoes Jeremiah 17:7-8, which uses nearly identical language. The 'chaff driven by wind' imagery appears in Isaiah 17:13 and Hosea 13:3. The torah meditation theme connects to Joshua 1:8, where the same verb hagah ('meditate, murmur') and the same promise of success appear in God's charge to Joshua.*

How fortunate is the person
who has not walked in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stood in the path of sinners,
nor sat in the seat of scoffers.

²Rather, his delight is in the instruction of the LORD,
and on His instruction he meditates day and night.

³He will be like a tree
transplanted beside channels of water,
which yields its fruit in its season
and whose leaf does not wither.
Everything he does will thrive.

⁴Not so the wicked —
they are like chaff
that the wind drives away.

⁵Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

⁶For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The three-stage progression (walk, stand, sit) is a deliberate rhetorical intensification. Each verb represents deeper entrenchment in a way of life opposed to God. The progression from counsel (atsah) to path (derekh) to seat (moshav) mirrors the movement from occasional influence to habitual practice to permanent residence.
1. Ashre is a plural construct — literally 'happinesses of' — functioning as an exclamation. It appears 26 times in the Psalter and always describes a state of flourishing that results from right relationship with God or right conduct.
2. Torah in this context predates the later identification of Torah with the Pentateuch. Here it encompasses any authoritative instruction from God — wisdom, commandment, prophetic word. We render it 'instruction' rather than 'law' to avoid the misleading implication that the psalmist delights in legal code.
2. The verb haghah appears in Joshua 1:8 in the identical phrase: 'you shall meditate on it day and night.' The parallel suggests that Psalm 1 consciously echoes the charge given to Joshua as Israel's leader — the Psalter's ideal reader takes on a Joshua-like posture before God's word.
3. We render shatul as 'transplanted' rather than 'planted' because the word implies relocation — the tree was moved from one place to another and deliberately set beside water. This carries theological weight: the righteous person has been repositioned by choice or by God's action into a place of nourishment.
3. The verb yatsliach ('will prosper, will succeed') in the final clause shifts the metaphor from the tree back to the person. Jeremiah 17:7-8 uses almost identical imagery but adds the detail that such a tree 'does not fear when heat comes' — an expansion of the same metaphor to include resilience under pressure.
4. The brevity of this verse is itself a rhetorical statement. The tree of verse 3 received elaborate description — transplanted, watered, fruitful, leafy, prospering. The wicked receive three words of metaphor: chaff, wind, gone. The asymmetry communicates that wickedness has no substance worth describing at length.
5. The mishpat ('judgment') here may refer to God's ongoing governance of moral reality rather than a single eschatological event. The psalm's perspective is that the moral order is self-executing: the wicked do not endure because wickedness has no structural integrity.
5. The tsaddiqim ('righteous ones') appear here for the first time in the Psalter — the positive counterpart to the resha'im introduced in verse 1. The entire psalm builds toward this contrast: two categories, two destinies, no middle ground.
6. We render yodea as 'watches over' rather than 'knows' to capture the active, caring dimension of Hebrew knowledge. God's knowing is never passive observation — it is covenantal attention. The same verb describes God 'knowing' Israel in Amos 3:2: 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth.'
6. The psalm ends where it began — with the two ways. Derekh ('way') appeared in verse 1 as the path of sinners; now it appears twice as the governing metaphor for life's trajectory. The Psalter's opening word is ashre ('fortunate'); its theological claim is that fortune belongs to those whose way God knows.

2

Summary: *Psalm 2 is a royal psalm depicting the nations in rebellion against the LORD and His anointed king. God responds with laughter from heaven, installs His king on Zion, and declares the king His son by decree. The psalm ends with a warning to the rulers of the earth and a beatitude that echoes Psalm 1.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This psalm gives the Psalter its political theology. Where Psalm 1 addressed the individual, Psalm 2 addresses the nations. Together they form a double introduction: the righteous individual and the anointed king, torah piety and Zion theology. The divine decree in verse 7 — 'You are my son; today I have begotten you' — is the most explosive royal formula in the Hebrew Bible. It does not claim the king is divine by nature but that God has adopted the Davidic king into a father-son relationship at the moment of enthronement. The laughter of God in verse 4 is one of only three places in the Psalter where God laughs, and in every case, it is directed at the futility of opposition.*

Translation Friction: *The Hebrew mashiach ('anointed one') in verse 2 refers to the reigning Davidic king, not to a future messianic figure — in its original context, this is an enthronement psalm for a specific historical coronation. The later messianic reading is a theological development built on this foundation but should not be read back into the Hebrew poet's original intention. The 'begetting' language in verse 7 is adoptive and legal, not biological — the king becomes God's son by decree on the day of coronation, following ancient Near Eastern royal adoption formulas.*

Connections: *The closing ashre ('happy, fortunate') in verse 12 echoes the opening ashre of Psalm 1:1, forming an inclusio around the paired introduction. The divine decree formula in verse 7 is echoed in 2 Samuel 7:14 ('I will be his father, and he will be my son'). The 'rod of iron' in verse 9 reappears in Revelation 2:27. The nations' conspiracy language parallels the scene in Isaiah 8:9-10. Acts 4:25-26 and Acts 13:33 quote this psalm directly in reference to Jesus.*

¹Why do the nations conspire
and the peoples plot in vain?

²The kings of the earth take their stand
and the rulers conspire together
against the LORD and against His anointed:

³"Let us tear off their chains
and throw off their ropes from us!"

⁴The One enthroned in the heavens laughs;
the Lord mocks them.

⁵Then He speaks to them in His anger
and terrifies them in His burning wrath:

⁶"But I — I have installed my king
upon Zion, my holy mountain."

⁷I will recount the decree of the LORD.
He said to me, "You are my son;
today I have begotten you."

⁸Ask of me, and I will give the nations as your inheritance,
the ends of the earth as your possession.

⁹You will shatter them with an iron rod;
like a potter's vessel you will smash them to pieces.

¹⁰So now, O kings, act wisely;
be warned, you rulers of the earth.

¹¹Worship the LORD in reverent fear
and rejoice with trembling.

¹²Pay homage to the son, lest He grow angry
and you perish on the way,
for His wrath ignites in an instant.
How fortunate are all who take refuge in Him!

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb *hagah* links Psalms 1 and 2 as a matched pair. In 1:2, the righteous person *hagah*-s on torah (fruitful meditation); in 2:1, the nations *hagah* on *riq* (futile plotting). The same verb, opposite objects, opposite outcomes.
1. *Goyim* ('nations') and *le'ummim* ('peoples') form a standard parallel pair in Hebrew poetry. In this context, they refer to vassal nations or neighboring kingdoms who see a royal transition as an opportunity to break free from Judah's dominance.
2. *Mashiach* ('anointed one') is the term from which 'Messiah' derives (via Greek *christos*). In its original setting, every Davidic king was a *mashiach* — anointed with oil at coronation (1 Samuel 16:13, 1 Kings 1:39). The term does not inherently predict a future figure; it describes a present office. The later messianic interpretation builds on the pattern of ideal kingship this psalm establishes.
3. The shift to direct speech gives the rebellion a voice. The plural possessive — 'their bonds' and 'their cords' — refers to both the LORD and His anointed, treating God and king as a single oppressive regime. The rebels do not distinguish between divine authority and royal authority; both are chains to be broken.
4. God laughs in only three psalms: here, in Psalm 37:13, and Psalm 59:9 (Hebrew v. 10). In each case, the laughter is directed at those who oppose God's purposes. It is not cruelty but the natural response of infinite power to finite rebellion.
4. *Adonai* ('the Lord') is used here rather than *YHWH*, possibly for rhythmic variation. The two titles — *YHWH* in verse 2 and *Adonai* here — together affirm that the God the nations oppose is both the covenant God of Israel and the sovereign Lord of all.
5. The anthropomorphic language — God's nostril, God's burning — is standard Hebrew idiom for intense emotion. The bodily imagery (flaring nostrils, heat) communicates the reality of divine response without claiming that God has a physical body. Hebrew theology routinely uses bodily metaphors for God while simultaneously affirming God's transcendence.
6. The shift to first-person divine speech is dramatic. God moves from laughing at the rebels to addressing them directly with a *fait accompli*. The phrase *malki* ('my king') is possessive — this is God's king, installed by God's authority, on God's mountain. The rebels face not a human political arrangement but a divine one.
7. The phrase 'I have begotten you' (*yelidtikha*) uses the verb *yalad* ('to give birth, to beget'). In context, this is legal-relational language, not biological. God does not claim physical paternity of the king; God establishes a covenant relationship modeled on the most intimate human bond. The declaration creates the relationship in the act of speaking it — it is performative language.
7. The 'decree' (*choq*) suggests a formal written document, possibly a coronation charter. Some scholars see this as evidence that Israelite kings received a written protocol at enthronement, similar to the Egyptian practice of delivering a royal titulary.
8. The language of inheritance (*nachalah*) and possession (*achuzzah*) draws on Israel's land theology. Just as the tribes received their portions of Canaan as *nachalah* from God (Joshua 13-21), the king receives the nations as his divine inheritance. The scope has expanded from tribal territory to the entire earth.
9. The ambiguity between *tero'em* ('you will shatter,' from *ra'a*) and *tir'em* ('you will shepherd,' from *ra'ah*) is preserved in the consonantal Hebrew text — the difference is only in vowel pointing. The Masoretic vocalization chose 'shatter,' while the Septuagint chose 'shepherd.' Both readings have theological legitimacy: the king both rules and judges. Revelation 2:27 combines both senses.

9. The potter's vessel image emphasizes the irreversibility of judgment. A shattered clay pot cannot be reassembled — the destruction is permanent. Jeremiah 19:11 uses the same image for Jerusalem's coming destruction.
10. The shift from military imagery (iron rod, shattered pottery) to wisdom vocabulary (haskilu, hivvas'ru) is striking. The same kings threatened with destruction are offered instruction. This tension between judgment and mercy runs through the entire psalm and reflects the broader biblical pattern: warning always precedes punishment.
11. The pairing of gilú ('rejoice') with re'adah ('trembling') appears paradoxical only if joy and fear are understood as mutually exclusive. In Hebrew theology, they are complementary: the God who is terrifyingly powerful is also the source of all delight. Philippians 2:12 ('work out your salvation with fear and trembling') may echo this verse.
12. The phrase nashqu var is one of the most debated expressions in the Psalter. Bar as 'son' is Aramaic, not standard Hebrew (where ben would be expected). Some scholars emend to nashshequ ('arm yourselves with') or repoint to bar as 'purity' ('kiss purity' = 'embrace what is pure'). We follow the traditional reading 'pay homage to the son' because it best fits the psalm's narrative: the nations are told to submit to the king God has installed.
12. The verb chasah ('to take refuge') is one of the Psalter's signature words — it appears over 25 times in the psalms. Refuge in the LORD is the Psalter's answer to every form of danger: military, political, personal, and spiritual. The psalm that began with nations raging ends with an invitation to shelter.

3

Summary: *Psalm 3 is the first psalm attributed to David and the first individual lament in the Psalter. Its superscription places it during Absalom's rebellion, when David fled Jerusalem. Despite being surrounded by enemies who declare God will not save him, the psalmist confesses the LORD as his shield, lies down and sleeps in confidence, and calls on God to rise and deliver.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This is the Psalter's first morning psalm — the speaker has slept through the night despite being surrounded by enemies and wakes to declare trust. The act of sleeping when threatened is itself an act of faith: the person who can sleep in danger has transferred responsibility to God. The structure moves from crisis (vv. 2-3) through confession of trust (vv. 4-5) to confidence (vv. 6-7) to petition and blessing (vv. 8-9). This movement from lament to trust becomes the template for dozens of psalms that follow.*

Translation Friction: *The superscription (verse 1 in Hebrew) attributes this psalm to David's flight from Absalom (2 Samuel 15-18). Whether this reflects historical memory or later editorial framing is debated. The superscriptions were likely added by editors who connected psalms to episodes in David's life. The theological content of the psalm works with or without the historical setting — it is the prayer of any person surrounded by enemies who declare that God has abandoned them.*

Connections: *The Absalom narrative is in 2 Samuel 15-18. The phrase 'salvation belongs to the LORD' (v. 9) echoes Jonah 2:9. The 'shield' metaphor for God appears in Genesis 15:1 (God to Abraham: 'I am your shield'). The cry 'Rise up, O LORD' echoes Numbers 10:35, the ancient battle cry when the Ark advanced. Selah appears three times — its first occurrence in the Psalter.*

¹A psalm of David,
when he fled from his son Absalom.

²O LORD, how many are my enemies!
Many are rising against me.

³Many are saying about me,
"There is no deliverance for him from God."
Selah.

⁴But You, O LORD, are a shield around me,
my glory, the One who lifts my head.

5With my voice I cry out to the LORD,
and He answers me from His holy mountain.
Selah.

6I lay down and slept;
I woke again, for the LORD sustains me.

7I will not fear the tens of thousands of people
who have positioned themselves against me on every side.

8Rise up, O LORD! Save me, my God!
For You have struck all my enemies on the jaw;
You have shattered the teeth of the wicked.

9Salvation belongs to the LORD;
Your blessing is upon Your people.
Selah.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. This is the first superscription in the Psalter that provides both authorship (le-David, 'of David' or 'for David' or 'belonging to David') and a historical occasion. The preposition le- is ambiguous: it could indicate authorship, dedication, or collection. The historical note connects the psalm to 2 Samuel 15-18, where David fled Jerusalem barefoot and weeping as his son seized the throne.
2. The address to YHWH at the opening establishes this as prayer, not mere complaint. The psalmist does not describe his situation to a human audience but brings it directly to God. This directness — naming the crisis before the sovereign — is the defining characteristic of biblical lament.
3. Selah (selah) appears 71 times in the Psalter and 3 times in Habakkuk 3. Its meaning is debated: it may derive from salal ('to lift up') indicating a musical crescendo, or from salah ('to pause') indicating a break for reflection. The Septuagint renders it diapsalma ('interlude'). We transliterate rather than translate because no consensus exists.
3. The phrase ein yeshu'atah lo b-Elohim is a direct denial of the most basic confession of Israelite faith: that God saves. In the Absalom context, this echoes the counsel of those who believed God had transferred favor from David to his son (2 Samuel 16:8, Shimei's curse).
4. The phrase kevodi ('my glory') is striking — the psalmist attributes his kavod ('glory, honor, weight, significance') entirely to God. If David is the speaker, this is a king acknowledging that his royal dignity derives not from the throne but from the LORD. The enemies may have stripped him of crown and city, but they cannot strip him of the glory that comes from God.
4. Merim roshi ('the lifter of my head') is a gesture of restoration. In the ancient world, a defeated person hung their head; to have one's head lifted was to be vindicated, acquitted, restored to honor (cf. Genesis 40:13, where Pharaoh 'lifts the head' of the cupbearer to restore him).
5. The tension between David fleeing from Jerusalem (the superscription's setting) and God answering from His holy mountain is theologically productive. The physical holy mountain may be in enemy hands, but God is not confined to His mountain. He answers from Zion even when the worshiper cannot reach Zion.
6. The three verbs (lay down, slept, woke) echo the daily rhythm of Deuteronomy 6:7 ('when you lie down and when you rise up'). The psalmist's faith is not a crisis-mode exception but woven into ordinary physical experience. Psalm 4:9 will make the same connection between trust and sleep.
7. The progression from verse 2 ('how many are my enemies') to verse 7 ('I will not fear tens of thousands') shows the psalm's emotional arc. The same reality — massive opposition — is perceived differently after the confession of trust in verses 4-6. The circumstances have not changed; the psalmist's posture has.
8. The cry qumah YHWH ('arise, O LORD') appears in Numbers 10:35, Psalm 7:7, Psalm 9:20, Psalm 10:12, and elsewhere. It is one of the oldest prayers in the Hebrew Bible, rooted in the tradition of the Ark of the Covenant leading Israel into battle. To ask God to 'arise' is to ask Him to act, to intervene, to make His power visible.
8. The perfect tense verbs ('You have struck,' 'You have shattered') may describe either past experience or prophetic confidence — the psalmist is so certain of God's action that he speaks of it as already accomplished. This 'prophetic perfect' is common in psalms of trust.
9. The phrase la-YHWH ha-yeshu'ah echoes Jonah 2:10 (Hebrew v. 10), where Jonah declares from the belly of the fish: yeshu'atah la-YHWH ('salvation belongs to the LORD'). Both speakers make this declaration from a place of extremity — surrounded by enemies (David) or swallowed by the sea (Jonah). The confession that salvation is God's exclusive property is precisely the confession that desperation produces.

9. The shift from individual petition ('save me') to communal blessing ('upon Your people') is characteristic of Israelite prayer. The individual never prays in isolation from the community. Even in personal crisis, the psalmist remembers that he is part of a people.

4

Summary: *Psalm 4 is an evening psalm of trust, forming a natural pair with Psalm 3 (the morning psalm). The psalmist calls out to God in distress, challenges those who pursue falsehood, affirms that the LORD has set apart the faithful one, and closes with a declaration of peace and security in sleep. The psalm moves from petition through rebuke to serene confidence.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The closing verse — 'in peace I will both lie down and sleep, for You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety' — is one of the most intimate expressions of trust in the entire Psalter. Where Psalm 3 described sleeping despite enemies, Psalm 4 describes the inner quality of that sleep: shalom, wholeness, peace. The psalmist's security is not circumstantial but relational — it rests on the word 'alone' (levadad): God alone, without any other guarantee, is sufficient. This is the Psalter's answer to anxiety.*

Translation Friction: *The superscription mentions the director of music (la-menatseach) and stringed instruments (bi-neginot), indicating liturgical use — this personal prayer was also public worship. The identity of the opponents is unclear: bene ish ('sons of men,' or 'men of rank') in verse 3 may refer to social elites who pursue empty prestige rather than God's truth. The phrase hiflah YHWH chasid lo (v. 4) is debated — does it mean God has 'set apart' or 'done wonders for' the faithful one?*

Connections: *Psalm 4 pairs with Psalm 3 as evening-morning bookends (3 = morning awakening; 4 = evening lying down). The phrase 'offer right sacrifices and trust in the LORD' (v. 6) echoes Deuteronomy 33:19. The question 'Who will show us good?' (v. 7) mirrors the skeptical question in Psalm 12:5 and Malachi 2:17. The 'light of Your face' (v. 7) draws on the Aaronic blessing of Numbers 6:25-26.*

1For the director of music. With stringed instruments.

A psalm of David.

2When I call, answer me, O God of my righteousness.

In my distress You gave me room;
be gracious to me and hear my prayer.

3You people of rank — how long will my honor be turned to shame?

How long will you love emptiness
and pursue falsehood?
Selah.

4Know this: the LORD has set apart the faithful one for Himself;
the LORD hears when I call to Him.

5Tremble, but do not sin;
search your hearts on your beds
and be silent.
Selah.

6Offer right sacrifices
and trust in the LORD.

7Many are saying, "Who will show us any good?"
Lift up the light of Your face upon us, O LORD.

8You have put more joy in my heart
than they have when their grain and new wine overflow.

9In peace I will both lie down and sleep,
for You alone, O LORD,
make me dwell in safety.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. La-menatseach ('for the director of music' or 'for the choirmaster') appears in 55 psalm superscriptions. The root n-ts-ch can mean 'to endure, to oversee, to direct.' Bi-neginot ('with stringed instruments') indicates instrumental accompaniment — neginah refers to the playing of stringed instruments (lyre, harp). This is the first psalm with performance instructions, signaling that the Psalter was designed for corporate worship, not just private reading.
2. The spatial metaphor — constriction versus spaciousness — is fundamental to Hebrew descriptions of distress and deliverance. Distress is narrowness; salvation is width. The same metaphor appears in Psalm 18:20 ('He brought me out into a spacious place') and Psalm 118:5 ('from the narrow place I called to the LORD; He answered me in the wide open').
3. The word kevodi ('my glory, my honor') is the same term used in Psalm 3:4, where God is called 'my glory.' Here the opponents attack it. The psalmist's dignity comes from God (Psalm 3); the enemies assault that God-given dignity (Psalm 4). The two psalms illuminate each other.
3. Kazav ('falsehood, lie') in the Psalter typically refers not to casual dishonesty but to a fundamental orientation toward unreality — choosing illusion over truth, image over substance. It is the moral opposite of emet ('truth, reliability, faithfulness').
4. Chasid ('faithful one, devotee, loyal one') derives from chesed ('faithful love, loyal kindness, covenant loyalty'). The chasid is the person who both receives and practices chesed — they are loyal to God, and God is loyal to them. It is a relational term, not merely a moral one. Later Judaism used chasidim ('pious ones') as a designation for the devout (cf. the Hasidim and later the Hasidic movement).
5. Ephesians 4:26 quotes this verse directly: 'Be angry and do not sin.' Paul follows the Septuagint reading of rigzu as orgizesthe ('be angry'). The Hebrew rigzu is broader — it includes anger but also trembling, agitation, and emotional disturbance of any kind. The point is the same: strong emotion is not condemned, but its expression must be governed.
5. The instruction to examine one's heart 'on your beds' connects to the psalm's evening setting. Nighttime self-examination — lying in the dark with nothing to distract — is a practice the psalm recommends to opponents and reader alike.
6. Zivche tsedeq ('sacrifices of righteousness') could mean either sacrifices that are themselves righteous (properly performed) or sacrifices offered by righteous people. The ambiguity is probably intentional — both senses apply. True worship requires both proper form and proper heart. Psalm 51:19 will later distinguish between 'sacrifices of God' (a broken spirit) and external burnt offerings.
7. The phrase or panekha ('the light of Your face') derives from the ancient Near Eastern convention that a king's favorable attention was described as his face 'shining' or 'being lifted.' When applied to God, it means God's gracious, attentive, approving presence. The opposite — God hiding His face (haster panim) — means abandonment and wrath. The psalmist asks for the most basic divine gift: that God would look at His people with favor.
8. The comparison between spiritual joy and harvest abundance is not a dismissal of material blessings but a ranking. The psalmist does not say grain and wine are bad — they are good gifts. But the simchah ('joy, gladness') that God places directly in the heart outranks even the best material conditions. This anticipates the Psalter's theology of God as the ultimate good, beyond all gifts.
9. The word shalom encompasses more than 'peace' in the English sense. Its root sh-l-m means 'to be complete, to be whole, to be sound.' Shalom is the state in which nothing is missing, nothing is broken, nothing is threatened. To lie down in shalom is to rest in total well-being — a condition only God can provide.
9. The phrase levadad ('alone, uniquely') makes a theological claim of enormous weight: God alone, without supplement, is sufficient for human safety. This is not a statement about isolation but about sufficiency — the psalmist needs no other guarantee because the divine guarantee is complete.

5

Summary: *Psalm 5 is a morning prayer in which the psalmist cries out to God at dawn, contrasts the character of God (who hates wickedness) with the character of the wicked (who speak lies and practice treachery), and asks to be led in God's righteousness. It closes with a petition for the wicked to face the consequences of their rebellion and for the righteous to rejoice under God's protection.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This psalm establishes the morning as the privileged time of prayer — the psalmist arranges his case before God at dawn and watches expectantly. The Hebrew verb arokh ('I will arrange, set in order') in verse 4 is sacrificial language: the same word used for arranging wood on the altar or setting out the showbread. Morning prayer is presented as a kind of sacrifice. The psalm also contains one of the Psalter's most vivid descriptions of the wicked: their throat is an open grave, their tongue flatters, their inward being is destruction. The exterior is smooth; the interior is ruin.*

Translation Friction: *The superscription mentions ha-nechilot, which may mean 'flutes' or may derive from nachalah ('inheritance'). The meaning is uncertain. The psalm's call for God to 'declare them guilty' and 'let them fall by their own counsels' (v. 11) is the first imprecation in the Psalter — a prayer against enemies that troubles modern readers. These prayers emerge from a worldview in which God's justice must be visible and the moral order must be vindicated publicly. The psalmist places judgment in God's hands rather than taking revenge personally.*

Connections: *The morning prayer theme connects to Psalm 3:6 (waking) and Psalm 4:9 (sleeping in peace). The 'open grave' throat image in verse 10 is quoted by Paul in Romans 3:13. The petition to be led in God's righteousness (v. 9) anticipates Psalm 23:3 ('He leads me in paths of righteousness'). The protective 'shield' (tsinnah) in verse 13 echoes the magen ('shield') of Psalm 3:4.*

¹For the director of music. For flutes.
A psalm of David.

²Give ear to my words, O LORD;
pay attention to my groaning.

³Attend to the sound of my cry for help,
my King and my God,
for to You I pray.

⁴O LORD, in the morning You hear my voice;
in the morning I lay my case before You
and watch expectantly.

⁵For You are not a God who delights in wickedness;
evil cannot dwell with You.

⁶The arrogant cannot stand before Your eyes;
You hate all who practice evil.

⁷You destroy those who speak falsehood;
the LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful.

⁸But I, through the abundance of Your faithful love,
will enter Your house;
I will bow down toward Your holy temple

in reverence for You.

⁹Lead me, O LORD, in Your righteousness
because of those who watch for my fall;
make Your way straight before me.

¹⁰For there is nothing reliable in their mouth;
their inward being is destruction;
their throat is an open grave;
they make their tongue smooth.

¹¹Declare them guilty, O God;
let them fall by their own schemes.
For the abundance of their rebellions, drive them out,
for they have defied You.

¹²But let all who take refuge in You rejoice;
let them sing for joy forever.
Spread Your protection over them,
and let those who love Your name exult in You.

¹³For You, O LORD, bless the righteous;
You surround them with favor like a shield.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Ha-nechilot is traditionally rendered 'flutes' based on a connection to chalil ('flute, pipe'). Some scholars derive it from nachalah ('inheritance') and read it as a liturgical designation ('concerning inheritances'). The uncertainty reflects the broader challenge of psalm superscriptions: they preserve performance traditions whose precise meaning was lost before the superscriptions were fully understood.
2. The word hagig ('murmuring, sighing, groaning') is related to hagah ('to meditate, to mutter') from Psalm 1:2, but here it emphasizes the emotional, pre-rational dimension of communication with God. Prayer in the Psalter is not limited to articulate petition — it includes groans, cries, and wordless distress (cf. Romans 8:26, 'the Spirit intercedes with groanings too deep for words').
3. The title malki ('my King') anticipates the Psalter's extensive royal theology. God is king over Israel, over creation, and over the nations. The psalms that declare YHWH malakh ('the LORD reigns,' Psalms 93, 95-99) develop what is seeded here: the worshiper's personal confession that God rules.
4. The sacrificial overtone of arokh ('I arrange, I set in order') suggests the psalmist understands morning prayer as a kind of offering — words arranged before God with the same deliberation as wood arranged on the altar. This connects to Psalm 141:2, where prayer is explicitly equated with incense and the evening sacrifice.
5. The declaration that evil 'cannot dwell' with God uses the language of hospitality (gur, 'to sojourn as a guest'). In a culture where hospitality was sacred obligation, saying that evil cannot even sojourn with God is a powerful statement of absolute incompatibility. God does not welcome evil even temporarily.
6. The statement 'You hate all workers of iniquity' troubles readers who emphasize God's universal love. In the Psalter's theology, God's love for righteousness and God's hatred of wickedness are two sides of the same reality. A God who loves justice must oppose injustice. The hatred is directed at persistent, deliberate evildoing — at those who have made wickedness their craft (po'ale, 'workers, practitioners').
7. Ish damim ('man of blood') literally means 'man of bloods' (plural), suggesting multiple acts of violence. The term appears in 2 Samuel 16:7-8, where Shimei calls David an ish damim — a false accusation in context, but the term itself describes someone whose life is characterized by violence.
8. The distinction between the wicked who 'cannot stand before God's eyes' (v. 6) and the psalmist who 'enters God's house' (v. 8) rests entirely on chesed — not on comparative moral achievement. The psalmist does not claim to be sinless; he claims to be a recipient of God's faithful love. This anticipates the Reformation insight that access to God is by grace, not merit.
9. The prayer to be led 'in Your righteousness' (be-tsidqatekha) makes God's character the navigation standard, not the psalmist's own moral compass. This is the Psalter's consistent pattern: human beings do not generate their own righteousness but walk in God's. Psalm 23:3 develops this same idea: 'He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.'

10. Paul quotes this verse in Romans 3:13 as part of his catena of Old Testament texts proving universal human sinfulness. The 'open grave' image is particularly effective: a grave that has been opened releases decay into the air. The enemies' speech similarly releases moral contamination into the social atmosphere.
10. The contrast between smooth exterior (flattering tongue) and ruined interior (destruction within) is the anatomy of a deceiver. The psalm insists that God sees both — the outer presentation and the inner reality — and judges by the interior.
11. Imprecatory prayers (psalms that call for judgment on enemies) disturb modern readers, but they serve a critical theological function: the psalmist places vengeance in God's hands rather than taking personal revenge. The prayer acknowledges that justice is God's responsibility, not the victim's. It is the opposite of vigilante violence — it is the surrender of the desire for revenge to the divine court.
12. The three verbs of joy (samach, ranan, alats) represent the full spectrum of rejoicing: inner gladness, vocal celebration, and physical exuberance. The Psalter's vision of worship is never merely mental — it involves the whole body, the whole voice, the whole community.
13. The tsinnah ('large shield') is distinct from the magen ('small shield') of Psalm 3:4. The tsinnah covered the entire body (cf. 1 Samuel 17:7, where Goliath's shield-bearer carried a tsinnah before him). Choosing the larger shield emphasizes the comprehensiveness of God's protective favor — it covers everything.
13. The word ratson ('favor') describes God's disposition toward the righteous — not merely tolerance but active delight. When God's ratson surrounds a person, that person is enveloped in divine good will. This is the Psalter's alternative to the enemies' hostility: whatever opposition surrounds the righteous, God's favor surrounds them more completely.

6

Summary: *Psalm 6 is the first of the seven traditional penitential psalms and the Psalter's first sustained cry of physical and emotional suffering. The psalmist begs God not to rebuke in anger, describes bones shaking and a soul in terror, asks 'how long?', weeps through the night until his bed is drenched, and then pivots suddenly to confidence that God has heard. It is raw, embodied prayer from the edge of death.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The pivot between verses 8 and 9 is one of the sharpest in the Psalter. For seven verses the psalmist weeps, trembles, and begs. Then in verse 9 (Hebrew v. 10), without explanation, certainty arrives: 'The LORD has heard my weeping.' No answer is described; no vision is recounted. Something shifts in the act of praying itself. The psalm records the moment when lament becomes confidence — not because circumstances changed but because the psalmist experienced being heard. This is the Psalter's testimony that prayer works on the one who prays.*

Translation Friction: *The superscription mentions sheminit ('the eighth'), possibly referring to an eight-stringed instrument or a lower octave — the musical setting matches the psalm's gravity. The theological question the psalm raises but does not answer is whether the suffering is punishment (the psalmist asks God not to rebuke 'in anger') or undeserved affliction. The psalmist never confesses a specific sin, leaving the cause of suffering ambiguous. The argument from Sheol in verses 6 (Heb. v. 6) — that the dead cannot praise God — is a pragmatic appeal to God's self-interest: if I die, You lose a worshiper.*

Connections: *This is the first of the seven penitential psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143) in Christian tradition. The cry 'how long?' (ad matai) appears in Psalms 13, 35, 74, 79, 80, 89, and 90. The Sheol argument recurs in Psalm 30:10, Psalm 88:11-13, and Isaiah 38:18. The drenching of the bed with tears reappears in Psalm 42:4. Jesus quotes the phrase 'depart from me, all workers of evil' (v. 9) in Matthew 7:23.*

¹For the director of music. With stringed instruments, on the eighth.
A psalm of David.

²O LORD, do not rebuke me in Your anger;
do not discipline me in Your wrath.

³Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am wasting away.
Heal me, O LORD, for my bones are shaking.

⁴My whole being is deeply shaken —
and You, O LORD — how long?

⁵Turn back, O LORD, rescue my life;
save me because of Your faithful love.

⁶For in death there is no memory of You;
in Sheol, who will praise You?

⁷I am exhausted from my groaning;
every night I flood my bed;
with my tears I drench my couch.

⁸My eye has grown dim from grief;
it has aged because of all my enemies.

⁹Depart from me, all you workers of evil,
for the LORD has heard the sound of my weeping.

¹⁰The LORD has heard my plea for mercy;
the LORD accepts my prayer.

¹¹All my enemies will be ashamed and deeply shaken;
they will turn back — ashamed in an instant.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Sheminit ('the eighth') may refer to an eight-stringed instrument, a musical mode, or a lower octave (contrasting with *alamot*, 'maidens,' possibly a higher register, in Psalm 46:1). The term also appears in 1 Chronicles 15:21 in a musical context. Whatever its precise meaning, the combination of stringed instruments and the sheminit designation sets a somber tonal register appropriate to the psalm's content.
2. This opening is repeated nearly verbatim in Psalm 38:2, the second penitential psalm. The request assumes that God does rebuke and discipline — the psalmist does not question that. The prayer is for moderation, not exemption. It reflects the wisdom tradition's view that divine discipline is part of the father-child relationship (Proverbs 3:11-12, 'the LORD disciplines those He loves').
3. The language of bones (*etsem*) suffering appears frequently in the Psalms (Psalm 22:15, 31:11, 32:3, 38:4, 42:11, 102:4). In Hebrew anthropology, bones represent the structural core of a person — when bones shake, the entire self is destabilized. Bone-language in the Psalter always signals suffering that has reached the deepest level of the person.
4. The broken sentence 'and You, O LORD — how long?' is one of the most powerful lines in the Psalter precisely because it refuses to finish itself. The dash after 'how long' leaves the question open-ended, mirroring the experience of suffering that has no visible endpoint. The psalmist has run out of words but not out of address — he is still talking to God.
5. The appeal *le-ma'an chasdekha* ('for the sake of Your chesed') is a covenant argument. The psalmist reminds God of His own commitment. This is not manipulation but the exercise of covenant relationship — the weaker partner invoking the stronger partner's pledged loyalty. Abraham, Moses, and the prophets all use this form of argument with God.
6. The Sheol argument reflects early Israelite theology in which the afterlife was not a place of reward or punishment but a dim, diminished existence where the dead 'slept' without meaningful consciousness. Later Jewish theology (and Christian theology after it) would develop resurrection hope that changes this calculus, but the psalmist prays from within the limits of his own theology. His horizon is this life, and the argument is: this life is where praise happens.
7. The flooding-bed image is deliberate exaggeration (hyperbole) deployed for emotional truth rather than literal accuracy. The psalmist is not reporting water levels but communicating the experience of night after night of unrelenting grief. The bed — which should be a place of peace (Psalm 4:9) — has become a place of drowning.
8. The physical deterioration of the eye — wasting and aging — connects weeping (v. 7) to its bodily consequences. The Psalter does not separate emotional suffering from physical deterioration; the body bears what the soul endures. This integrated view of human suffering resists any attempt to spiritualize pain into something merely internal.

9. Jesus uses the phrase 'depart from me, all you workers of evil' in Matthew 7:23 and Luke 13:27, applying the psalmist's dismissal of enemies to the final judgment. The original context is personal deliverance; the New Testament application is eschatological. Both contexts share the core reality: those who practice evil cannot remain in the presence of the one whom God vindicates.
10. The shift from 'has heard' (perfect tense, completed action) to 'accepts' (imperfect tense, ongoing action) suggests that God's reception of prayer is not a single event but an ongoing reality. God heard the specific weeping and continues to receive prayer as an ongoing practice.
11. The repetition of *bahal* ('to be terrified') links the enemies' future fate to the psalmist's past suffering — the same word used for his bones (v. 3) and soul (v. 4) now applies to the enemies (v. 11). This verbal echo creates a sense of exact justice: the terror flows from the innocent to the guilty.

7

Summary: *Psalm 7 is a psalm of individual lament and self-imprecation — the psalmist calls on God for refuge from a pursuer, invokes a conditional curse on himself if he is guilty, and appeals to God as righteous judge of all peoples. The psalm describes God as a warrior who prepares weapons against the wicked, then depicts the wicked falling into the very pit they dug. It closes with thanksgiving for God's righteousness.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This psalm contains one of the Psalter's most dramatic oaths of innocence (vv. 4-6, Hebrew vv. 4-6): the psalmist invites his own destruction if he has done what his accuser claims. This is not casual protest but a formal self-imprecation — the ancient equivalent of placing yourself under oath before God's tribunal. The psalm also presents one of the Hebrew Bible's most vivid pictures of self-defeating evil: the wicked dig a pit and fall into it themselves; they conceive trouble and give birth to falsehood. Evil is not merely punished from outside — it devours its own practitioners.*

Translation Friction: *The superscription identifies this as a shiggayon — a term of uncertain meaning, possibly indicating an emotional, agitated style of composition. The reference to 'Cush the Benjaminite' has no clear parallel in the biblical narratives about David; it may refer to an otherwise unrecorded incident, or 'Cush' may be a coded reference to Saul (also a Benjaminite). The psalm's call for God to 'arise in anger' (v. 7) and judge the nations extends the individual conflict into cosmic scope — the psalmist sees his personal case as a test case for universal justice.*

Connections: *The self-imprecation formula (vv. 4-6) parallels Job's oath of innocence in Job 31. The pit-and-snare imagery (vv. 16-17) appears in Proverbs 26:27, Ecclesiastes 10:8, and Psalm 9:16. God as righteous judge (*shophet tsaddiq*) connects to Genesis 18:25 ('Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?'). The warrior-God imagery (vv. 13-14) echoes Deuteronomy 32:41-42.*

¹A shiggayon of David, which he sang to the LORD
on account of the words of Cush the Benjaminite.

²O LORD my God, in You I take refuge;
save me from all who pursue me and rescue me,

³lest he tear me apart like a lion,
ripping me to pieces with no one to rescue.

⁴O LORD my God, if I have done this —
if there is injustice on my hands —

⁵if I have repaid my ally with evil
or plundered my enemy without cause —

⁶then let the enemy pursue me and overtake me;
let him trample my life to the ground
and lay my honor in the dust.

Selah.

⁷Rise up, O LORD, in Your anger;
lift Yourself up against the fury of my enemies.
Awake for me — You have appointed judgment.

⁸Let the assembly of peoples gather around You,
and over them take Your seat on high.

⁹The LORD judges the peoples.
Vindicate me, O LORD,
according to my righteousness and my integrity.

¹⁰Let the evil of the wicked come to an end,
but establish the righteous —
You who test hearts and minds, O righteous God.

¹¹My shield is with God,
who saves the upright in heart.

¹²God is a righteous judge,
a God who shows indignation every day.

¹³If one does not repent, God sharpens His sword;
He bends His bow and makes it ready.

¹⁴He has prepared deadly weapons against him;
He makes His arrows into flaming shafts.

¹⁵See — he conceives iniquity,
is pregnant with trouble,
and gives birth to falsehood.

¹⁶He digs a pit and hollows it out,
then falls into the hole he has made.

¹⁷His trouble returns on his own head;
his violence comes down on his own skull.

¹⁸I will give thanks to the LORD for His righteousness
and sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Shiggayon (possibly from shagah, 'to wander, to err, to reel') may indicate a psalm of intense, wandering emotion — an agitated or ecstatic composition. The only other biblical occurrence is in Habakkuk 3:1 (plural: shigionot). The identity of Cush the Benjaminite is unknown. Some scholars connect him to Saul's household (Saul was a Benjaminite), but no narrative in Samuel mentions a figure named Cush. The superscription may preserve a tradition lost to us.
2. The combination of chasah ('to take refuge') and rod'fai ('my pursuers') creates a vivid scene: the psalmist is being chased and has run to God as a fortress. The imagery is not metaphorical in the abstract — it reflects the ancient practice of seeking sanctuary at a holy place, where the pursued could find protection under divine authority.

3. Lion imagery for enemies is common in the Psalter (Psalms 10:9, 17:12, 22:14, 22:22, 35:17, 57:5, 58:7). Lions were real threats in ancient Israel (cf. 1 Samuel 17:34, Amos 3:12), and their predatory behavior provided a ready metaphor for enemies who operate by ambush, overwhelming force, and the exploitation of vulnerability.
4. The self-imprecation (oath with conditional curse) was a legal procedure in the ancient Near East. A person could swear innocence and invoke destruction on themselves if they were lying. It was not undertaken lightly — it placed the swearer under divine judgment. Job 31 is the most extended example in the Hebrew Bible.
5. The phrase 'or plundered my enemy without cause' is a remarkable ethical claim: even enemies have rights. The psalmist does not claim he has no enemies — he claims he has not wronged them unjustly. This standard exceeds mere loyalty to friends; it requires fairness even toward adversaries.
6. The willingness to invoke one's own destruction is the ultimate act of self-confidence before God's tribunal. The psalmist is so certain of his innocence that he can afford to say: if I am wrong, destroy me. This is the opposite of evasion — it is a direct challenge to God to examine and judge.
7. The call for God to 'awake' does not reflect actual belief that God sleeps (Psalm 121:4, 'He who keeps Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps'). It is the language of urgent petition — a sufferer's way of saying: 'Act now, because from my perspective You appear to be doing nothing.' The same bold language appears in Psalm 44:24 and Isaiah 51:9.
8. The image of God enthroned above a gathered assembly of peoples combines courtroom and throne room. The nations serve as witnesses to God's just judgment. This scene anticipates the cosmic judgment imagery in Psalms 96-99, where God judges the peoples with equity.
9. The willingness to be judged 'according to my righteousness' is not arrogance but legal confidence in a specific case. The psalmist is not claiming universal sinlessness (the penitential psalms prove otherwise) but innocence regarding the particular accusation. Context determines whether 'judge me according to my righteousness' is presumptuous or appropriate.
10. The 'hearts and kidneys' pairing (lev and kelayot) represents the totality of the inner person. The heart thinks; the kidneys feel. Together they encompass the full range of human interiority. God's testing of both means that judgment is based on complete knowledge — motive, intention, and emotion, not just outward action. Jeremiah 11:20 and 17:10 use the identical phrase.
11. The phrase yishre lev ('upright in heart') echoes the yashar ('upright') of Job 1:1 and the derekh ('way') theology of Psalm 1. Uprightness of heart — internal moral alignment — is the consistent prerequisite for divine protection throughout the wisdom tradition.
12. The phrase be-khol yom ('every day') modifying God's indignation is remarkable. It transforms divine anger from a sudden eruption into a steady state — God is perpetually opposed to evil. This daily indignation is the dark side of daily faithfulness: the God who is faithful every morning (Lamentations 3:23) is also indignant every day.
13. The warrior-God imagery appears throughout the Hebrew Bible (Exodus 15:3, Deuteronomy 32:41-42, Isaiah 42:13). The image of God sharpening a sword and bending a bow is not primitive theology but vivid metaphor for divine justice that acts forcefully against entrenched evil. The conditional clause ('if he does not repent') preserves the possibility of mercy up to the last moment.
14. The word dolqim is ambiguous: it may mean 'burning' (describing the arrows as fiery) or 'hot pursuers' (describing the targets as relentless persecutors). The ambiguity may be intentional — fire meets fire; the burning arrows are aimed at those who burn with malice.
15. The birth metaphor for evil appears in James 1:15 ('sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death'), suggesting continuity between this psalm's imagery and New Testament moral theology. The point is identical: evil is not static but dynamic — it grows, develops, and produces offspring worse than itself.
16. The pit-digging image is one of the most widespread motifs in ancient Near Eastern wisdom. It appears in Proverbs 26:27 ('whoever digs a pit will fall into it'), Ecclesiastes 10:8 ('he who digs a pit will fall into it'), and Psalm 9:16 ('the nations sink into the pit they made'). The consistency of the image across traditions reflects a deeply held conviction that the moral order is structured for boomerang justice.
17. The word chamas ('violence') is one of the Hebrew Bible's most theologically loaded terms. It was the reason for the flood (Genesis 6:11, 'the earth was filled with chamas') and one of the prophets' most frequent accusations (Habakkuk 1:2-3, Amos 3:10). When chamas returns on the perpetrator's head, cosmic justice is being served.
18. The title Elyon ('Most High') is one of God's most ancient names, appearing in Genesis 14:18-22 (Melchizedek, priest of El Elyon). It emphasizes God's supreme sovereignty over all competing powers — political, spiritual, and cosmic. Combined with YHWH, it affirms that the covenant God of Israel is also the supreme ruler of the universe.

8

Summary: *Psalm 8 is a hymn of praise to the Creator, framed by the refrain 'O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth.' Between the bookends of cosmic praise, the psalmist gazes at the night sky, marvels that God attends to human beings at all, and declares that God has crowned humanity with glory and honor, placing all creation under human dominion. It is the Psalter's creation theology in miniature.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This psalm asks the question that no other creature can ask: 'What is a human being that You are mindful of him?' (mah enosh ki tizkrennu). The question emerges from looking at the stars — the vastness of the cosmos provokes not pride but astonishment at divine attention. The answer is equally astonishing: God has made humanity 'a little lower than the heavenly beings' (me'at from Elohim) and crowned them with kavod ve-hadar ('glory and honor'). The same kavod that belongs to God is shared with human beings. Humanity's place is not at the bottom of creation (mere dust) or at the top (divine), but in the extraordinary middle — a little less than God, ruling over everything else. The psalm is simultaneously the highest anthropology and the deepest humility in the Hebrew Bible.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase me'at from Elohim (v. 6, Heb.) is famously ambiguous. Elohim can mean 'God' or 'gods' or 'heavenly beings' or 'angels.' The Septuagint chose 'angels' (angelous), and Hebrews 2:7 follows that rendering. If it means 'God,' the claim is staggering: humanity is just below God Himself. If it means 'angels,' the claim is still remarkable but slightly lower on the cosmic hierarchy. The psalm's vision of human dominion over creation has been critiqued as licensing environmental exploitation, but the Hebrew verb mashal ('to rule') implies responsible stewardship under God, not autonomous exploitation — the human rules as God's deputy, not as God's replacement.*

Connections: *The psalm echoes Genesis 1:26-28 (dominion over animals, image of God). The list of creatures under human rule (v. 8-9) follows the same categories as Genesis 1: livestock, wild animals, birds, fish. Hebrews 2:6-8 quotes this psalm and applies the 'son of man' language to Jesus. 1 Corinthians 15:27 uses the 'all things under his feet' language for Christ's final reign. The refrain structure (identical opening and closing) is unique in the Psalter's first book.*

1For the director of music. According to the Gittith.
A psalm of David.

2O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is Your name in all the earth —
You who have set Your splendor above the heavens!

3From the mouths of infants and nursing babies
You have established strength
because of Your adversaries,
to silence the enemy and the avenger.

4When I look at Your heavens,
the work of Your fingers,
the moon and the stars that You have set in place —

5What is a human being that You remember him,
a son of Adam that You attend to him?

6Yet You made him a little lower than God,
and You crown him with glory and honor.

⁷You give him dominion over the works of Your hands;
You have placed everything under his feet:

⁸sheep and cattle, all of them,
and also the wild animals of the field,

⁹the birds of the sky and the fish of the sea —
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

¹⁰O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is Your name in all the earth!

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Gittith may refer to a musical instrument from Gath (a Philistine city), a winepress song (gat means 'winepress'), or a melody associated with the grape harvest. The term appears in the superscriptions of Psalms 8, 81, and 84. If it refers to a harvest melody, the creation-celebration content of Psalm 8 would suit a festive, agricultural setting.
2. The distinction between YHWH (the personal covenant name) and Adonenu ('our Lord, our master') is important. YHWH is who God is; Adon is what God is to us. The combination declares both identity and relationship. The plural possessive -enu ('our') makes this a communal confession, not merely individual praise.
3. Jesus quotes this verse in Matthew 21:16 when children cry 'Hosanna to the Son of David' in the temple and the chief priests object. Jesus reads the psalm as fulfilled in the children's praise. The Septuagint translates oz ('strength') as ainon ('praise'), shifting the meaning from 'You have established strength' to 'You have perfected praise' — both readings are theologically productive.
4. The nighttime setting (moon and stars, no sun) is significant. The night sky reveals more of the universe than daylight does — the naked eye can see thousands of stars, each one placed by God's fingers. The experience of smallness under the stars is universal, and the psalm captures it precisely: the vastness of the cosmos provokes the question of human significance.
5. The term ben adam ('son of man, son of Adam') here means simply 'human being.' In Daniel 7:13, the phrase takes on a more exalted meaning ('one like a son of man' approaching God's throne), and in the Gospels, Jesus adopts it as his primary self-designation. The trajectory from Psalm 8's humble 'mortal creature' to Daniel's heavenly figure to Jesus' self-identification is one of the most significant theological developments in biblical tradition.
6. The Septuagint's translation of Elohim as angelous ('angels') influenced the New Testament quotation in Hebrews 2:7. The Hebrew more naturally reads 'God' (Elohim without qualification normally means God), making the anthropological claim even bolder: humanity was made just slightly less than divine. The psalm does not explain how this is possible — it simply declares it with wonder.
6. Kavod ('glory') here echoes its use throughout the Psalter for God's own splendor. When the psalm says God crowns humanity with kavod, it is saying that the same weight, significance, and radiance that characterize God are shared — in diminished but real measure — with human beings. This is the Hebrew Bible's version of the imago Dei ('image of God') from Genesis 1:26-27.
7. 1 Corinthians 15:27 applies this verse to Christ: 'For God has put all things under his feet.' The move from humanity-in-general (Psalm 8) to Christ-in-particular (Paul) reflects early Christian theology's reading of the psalm as ultimately fulfilled in Jesus, the ideal human being who exercises the dominion that Adam forfeited.
8. The list of creatures under human dominion follows the Genesis 1 categories. Tsoneh ('sheep, flocks') and alafim ('cattle, oxen') represent domesticated animals. Bahamot sadai ('beasts of the field') represent wild land animals. The progression from domestic to wild reflects increasing degrees of human authority — ruling tame animals is easy; ruling wild ones demonstrates the full scope of the mandate.
9. The phrase archot yammim ('paths of the seas') is poetically evocative — it suggests that the sea has invisible routes, like roads, traveled by its creatures. Matthew Fontaine Maury, the 19th-century oceanographer considered the father of modern oceanography, reportedly was inspired by this phrase to search for ocean currents, though the historical details of that account are debated.
10. The exact repetition of the refrain with no modification is a deliberate structural choice. It signals that the psalm's content has not altered the fundamental truth — God's name remains majestic in all the earth — but has expanded the worshiper's comprehension of what that majesty includes. The frame holds; the picture inside it is now richer.

9

Summary: *Psalm 9 is a thanksgiving and lament psalm with an acrostic structure — each stanza begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet (though the pattern is incomplete; Psalms 9-10 together form the full acrostic). The psalmist praises God for judging the nations, rebuking the wicked, and defending the oppressed. He calls on God to arise and judge, declaring that the nations are mere mortals and the needy will not be forgotten forever.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This psalm introduces the theological concept that is central to much of the Psalter: God as the refuge and stronghold of the oppressed. The phrase misgav la-dakh ('a stronghold for the crushed') in verse 10 establishes a pattern that runs through the entire collection — God's power is directed specifically toward those who have no other power. The acrostic structure (aleph through kaph in Psalm 9, then continuing lamed through tav in Psalm 10) suggests that the two psalms were originally a single composition, an A-to-Z declaration that God rules justly from beginning to end.*

Translation Friction: *The acrostic pattern in Psalm 9 is imperfect — some letters are missing or appear out of order, which may indicate textual corruption, deliberate artistic variation, or the limits of fitting theology into a rigid alphabetic framework. The superscription mentions almut labben, a phrase of uncertain meaning (possibly 'death of the son,' a melody name, or a corruption of alamot, 'maidens'). The psalm alternates between past-tense praise (God has judged) and present-tense lament (enemies persist), creating a tension between confidence in what God has done and urgency about what God must still do.*

Connections: *Psalms 9 and 10 form a literary pair connected by acrostic structure and shared vocabulary. The 'pit they dug' image in verse 16 echoes Psalm 7:16. The cry qumah YHWH ('arise, O LORD') in verse 20 echoes Psalms 3:8 and 7:7. The declaration that God 'does not forget the cry of the afflicted' (v. 13) anticipates the theology of Psalms 10, 12, 22, and 34. The phrase 'the needy shall not always be forgotten' (v. 19) is the Psalter's most direct promise to the poor.*

¹For the director of music. According to 'The Death of the Son.'

A psalm of David.

²I will give thanks to the LORD with all my heart;

I will recount all Your wonders.

³I will rejoice and exult in You;

I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High.

⁴When my enemies turn back,
they stumble and perish before You.

⁵For You have upheld my case and my cause;
You sit on the throne, judging with righteousness.

⁶You have rebuked the nations;
You have destroyed the wicked.
You have wiped out their name forever and ever.

⁷The enemy is finished — perpetual ruins!
You have uprooted their cities;
the very memory of them has perished.

⁸But the LORD sits enthroned forever;
He has established His throne for judgment.

⁹He judges the world with righteousness;
He governs the peoples with equity.

¹⁰The LORD is a stronghold for the crushed,
a stronghold in times of distress.

¹¹Those who know Your name trust in You,
for You have not abandoned those who seek You, O LORD.

¹²Sing praises to the LORD who dwells in Zion;
declare His deeds among the peoples.

¹³For He who avenges blood remembers them;
He does not forget the cry of the afflicted.

¹⁴Be gracious to me, O LORD;
see my affliction at the hands of those who hate me,
You who lift me from the gates of death,

¹⁵so that I may declare all Your praises
in the gates of Daughter Zion,
that I may rejoice in Your salvation.

¹⁶The nations have sunk into the pit they made;
their own foot is caught in the net they hid.

¹⁷The LORD has made Himself known — He has executed judgment.
The wicked is snared by the work of his own hands.
Higgaion. Selah.

¹⁸The wicked will return to Sheol —
all the nations that forget God.

¹⁹For the needy will not always be forgotten;
the hope of the afflicted will not perish forever.

²⁰Rise up, O LORD! Do not let mortals prevail;
let the nations be judged before You.

²¹Strike fear into them, O LORD;
let the nations know they are only human.
Selah.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Almut labben (or mut labben) is one of the most obscure superscription terms. It may mean 'death of the son' (mavvet la-ben), possibly indicating a melody named for a song about a son's death. Some scholars repoint it as al alamot labben ('according to maidens' voices, for the son'). Others treat it as a liturgical or musical term whose original meaning was lost before the Masoretes vocalized the text. We transliterate the traditional reading while acknowledging its uncertainty.

2. The verb *saphar* ('to recount, to tell') is related to *sefer* ('book, document'). To recount God's wonders is to make them publicly known, to turn experience into testimony. The Psalter insists that praise is not private but communal — what God has done must be told.
3. The *bet* stanza opens with three verbs of joy: *esmechah* ('I will rejoice'), *e'eltsah* ('I will exult'), *azammerah* ('I will sing praise'). The title *Elyon* ('Most High') from Psalm 7:18 returns, affirming God's supreme sovereignty as the foundation for joy. The joy is directed *bekha* ('in You') — not in circumstances but in God's person.
4. The phrase *mippanekha* ('from before Your face, from Your presence') is theologically loaded. The 'face' of God in the Psalter represents direct encounter with the divine. For the righteous, it means blessing (Psalm 4:7); for the wicked, it means annihilation. The same presence produces opposite effects depending on the moral orientation of the one who encounters it.
5. The combination of *mishpat* ('justice, judgment') and *din* ('cause, legal case') covers both the process and the outcome of divine adjudication. God has both heard the case and rendered the verdict. The dual legal terminology emphasizes thoroughness — no aspect of the psalmist's cause has been overlooked.
6. Name-erasure (blotting out the *shem*) is the opposite of the psalm's opening, where God's name is praised. The wicked's name disappears forever; God's name endures in praise. The contrast between permanent divine fame and permanent wicked oblivion is the psalm's core theological architecture.
7. The completeness of destruction — physical (cities), temporal (forever), and memorial (memory erased) — reflects the ancient Near Eastern understanding that true destruction means being forgotten. A ruined city that is still remembered can be rebuilt. A city whose memory is erased cannot even be mourned. This is annihilation at the deepest level.
8. The contrast between the enemy's memory perishing (v. 7) and the LORD sitting forever (v. 8) is the psalm's central theological claim: evil is temporary; God's justice is eternal. The throne imagery anticipates the great enthronement psalms (93, 95-99) that declare *YHWH malakh* ('the LORD reigns').
9. This verse will be repeated almost verbatim in Psalm 96:13 and Psalm 98:9, where it forms the climax of enthronement hymns. The language of cosmic, equitable divine judgment is one of the Psalter's most consistent theological claims — it transcends individual lament to make a universal statement about God's governance.
10. The word *dakh* ('crushed') appears in Psalm 10:18 and describes the most vulnerable members of society — those who have been pressed down by forces they cannot resist. The Psalter's consistent claim is that God's power is directed toward these people specifically. This is not random benevolence but targeted justice: God fortifies the powerless.
11. The connection between knowing God's name and trusting God is a central Psalter theme. Trust (*bitachon*) is not blind — it is built on accumulated experience of God's faithfulness. The more one knows the name (the character), the more one trusts. This is relational knowledge, the kind that grows through time spent together.
12. The call to sing praises (*zamm'ru*) and declare (*haggidu*) God's deeds among the peoples (*ba-ammim*) extends worship beyond Israel to the nations. The LORD dwells in Zion (*yoshev Tsiyyon*) but His deeds concern all peoples. This outward-facing praise anticipates the missionary theology of Psalms 96, 98, and 117, where all nations are called to worship the LORD.
13. The *anavim* ('the afflicted, the humble, the lowly') are one of the Psalter's most important social categories. They are the poor, the oppressed, the powerless who depend entirely on God because human systems have failed them. The Psalter consistently claims that God hears specifically this group — not because they are morally superior but because they are vulnerable and have no other advocate.
14. The phrase *sha'are mavet* ('gates of death') pictures death as a walled city with gates — once entered, there is no return. The psalmist testifies that God has lifted him (*merom'mi*) from those very gates — pulled him back from the threshold of death. The imagery recurs in Psalm 107:18 and Isaiah 38:10. The request to 'see my affliction' (*re'eh onyi*) appeals to God's visual attention — to look and therefore to act.
15. The parallel between 'gates of death' (v. 14) and 'gates of Daughter Zion' (v. 15) is deliberately constructed. The two sets of gates represent the two possible destinations: death or life, silence or praise. God pulls the psalmist from one set of gates and sets him praising in the other.
16. The pit-and-net imagery draws on two hunting methods: the concealed pit (for large game) and the hidden net (for birds or smaller animals). Both depend on the victim not seeing the trap. The irony is that the trappers become their own victims — they know exactly where the trap is and yet somehow fall into it. This is the psalm's commentary on the blindness of wickedness.
17. *Higgayon* appears only here and in Psalm 92:4 (where it describes the sound of a harp) and possibly Psalm 19:15 (where it means 'meditation'). Its placement here after the statement about divine justice suggests a contemplative pause — a moment to meditate on the reality that God's justice is self-executing through the wicked's own actions.
18. The verb *shuv* ('to return') implies that Sheol is where the wicked belong — it is their natural habitat. They may temporarily walk among the living, but their destination was always the underworld. The nations' crime is not specified violence but forgetting — allowing God to drop from awareness, living as if God does not exist or does not matter.
19. The pairing of *evyon* ('needy') and *anavim* ('afflicted') represents the most vulnerable members of society. The Psalter's consistent advocacy for these groups reflects the prophetic tradition (Amos 2:6-7, Isaiah 10:1-2) and anticipates the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-5). The promise here is not that suffering will end immediately but that it will not last forever — a distinction that matters enormously to those enduring it.

- 20.** The word enosh ('mortal') is deliberately chosen over adam or ish to emphasize human frailty. The prayer is that fragile human power — which often seems overwhelming when wielded against the vulnerable — not be allowed to overrule divine justice. The nations may be powerful, but before God's face they are merely enosh: mortal, weak, temporary.
- 21.** The prayer for nations to know they are 'only human' (enosh hemmah) is one of the Psalter's most penetrating petitions. It does not ask for the nations' destruction but for their enlightenment — specifically, the enlightenment of recognizing their own mortality and limitation. The most dangerous people are those who forget they are enosh. The psalm asks God to remind them.

10

Summary: *Psalm 10 continues the acrostic begun in Psalm 9, completing the second half of the Hebrew alphabet. The psalm opens with a bold complaint — 'Why do You stand far off, O LORD?' — then provides the Psalter's most detailed portrait of the wicked person: arrogant, predatory, atheistic in practice, convinced God does not see. It closes with a confident petition that God will hear the afflicted, judge the oppressor, and defend the orphan and the crushed.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This psalm contains the most sustained character study of wickedness in the Psalter. Across verses 2-11, the wicked person is profiled with psychological precision: he pursues the poor, boasts about his desires, blesses the greedy, dismisses God from his thoughts, assumes his prosperity is permanent, believes God does not see, and operates as a hidden predator — a lion in a thicket, a hunter with a net. The portrait is not of supernatural evil but of ordinary human arrogance taken to its logical end: the practical atheism of someone who lives as if there is no moral accountability.*

Translation Friction: *Psalm 10 has no superscription in the Hebrew text, which is unusual for Book I of the Psalter (Psalms 3-41 all have superscriptions except Psalms 1, 2, 10, and 33). This supports the view that Psalms 9 and 10 were originally one composition — Psalm 10 continues without a new heading because it is the second half of Psalm 9's acrostic. The Septuagint (Greek Old Testament) combines them as a single psalm, which shifts the numbering of all subsequent psalms by one.*

Connections: *The acrostic structure continues from Psalm 9 (lamed through tav). The portrait of the wicked in verses 2-11 anticipates similar descriptions in Psalms 12, 14, 36, and 73. The cry 'Why do You stand far off?' echoes similar complaints in Psalms 22:2, 44:24-25, and 88:15. The petition qumah YHWH ('arise, O LORD') in verse 12 echoes Psalms 3:8, 7:7, and 9:20. The defense of the orphan and the oppressed connects to Deuteronomy 10:18 and Isaiah 1:17.*

¹Why, O LORD, do You stand far off?

Why do You hide in times of distress?

²In arrogance the wicked hotly pursue the poor;
let them be caught in the schemes they have devised.

³For the wicked boasts of his soul's desire;
the greedy person blesses himself and despises the LORD.

⁴The wicked, in the height of his arrogance, does not seek God.
"There is no God" — that is all his scheming.

⁵His ways prosper at all times;
Your judgments are far above, out of his sight.
All his enemies — he sneers at them.

⁶He says in his heart, "I will not be shaken;
generation after generation, no harm will touch me."

⁷His mouth is full of cursing, deceit, and oppression;
under his tongue lurk trouble and evil.

⁸He sits in ambush near the villages;
in hidden places he murders the innocent.
His eyes watch for the helpless.

⁹He lurks in hiding like a lion in its thicket;
he lurks to seize the poor.
He seizes the poor, dragging them into his net.

¹⁰He crushes and crouches,
and the helpless fall into his clutches.

¹¹He says in his heart, "God has forgotten;
He has hidden His face; He will never see."

¹²Rise up, O LORD! O God, lift up Your hand!
Do not forget the afflicted!

¹³Why does the wicked despise God?
He says in his heart, "You will not call me to account."

¹⁴But You do see! You observe trouble and grief
to take the matter into Your own hand.
The helpless entrust themselves to You;
You are the helper of the orphan.

¹⁵Break the arm of the wicked and the evildoer;
search out his wickedness until none remains.

¹⁶The LORD is king forever and ever;
the nations have perished from His land.

¹⁷O LORD, You have heard the desire of the afflicted;
You steady their hearts;
You incline Your ear,

¹⁸to defend the orphan and the crushed,
so that mere mortals from the earth
may terrify no more.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The question 'why do You stand far off?' is not apostasy but the deepest form of faith — it addresses God directly, assumes God has the power to act, and demands an account of God's apparent inactivity. Only a believer complains to God about God. The atheist has no one to accuse. The lament psalms insist that honest accusation is a legitimate form of prayer.
2. The word *ani* ('poor, afflicted') appears repeatedly in this psalm and throughout the Psalter. It does not describe only economic poverty but a condition of vulnerability — the person without resources, without power, without advocates. The wicked exploit precisely this vulnerability; God defends precisely this vulnerability.
3. The verb *ni'ets* ('to despise, to scorn, to treat with contempt') is among the strongest rejection verbs in Hebrew. It describes not passive indifference to God but active disdain — the greedy person has weighed God against profit and found God wanting. This is practical atheism expressed through

economic behavior.

4. The phrase *ein Elohim* ('there is no God') appears also in Psalm 14:1 and Psalm 53:2, where it is placed in the mouth of the naval ('fool'). The denial is not intellectual but behavioral — the wicked person's life functions as a continuous declaration that God is irrelevant. Every scheme that excludes God is a repetition of *ein Elohim*.
5. The observation that the wicked prosper 'at all times' creates the theological problem that drives many psalms (especially Psalm 73): if God is just, why do the wicked succeed? Psalm 10 does not resolve this tension — it describes it honestly and then appeals to God to act. The honesty about wicked prosperity is itself a form of faith: the psalmist tells God the truth about what he sees.
6. The phrase *le-dor va-dor* ('generation after generation') is normally used in the Psalter for God's faithfulness (Psalm 100:5, 'His faithfulness endures to all generations'). The wicked person here co-opts the language of divine permanence for himself — he claims for his own comfort what belongs only to God's character. This is the deepest form of idolatry: treating oneself as eternal.
7. Paul quotes this verse in Romans 3:14 as part of his argument for universal human sinfulness. The image of speech as weaponry — mouth full of cursing, tongue concealing evil — reflects the Psalter's deep awareness that language is the primary instrument of both worship and harm. The same tongue that praises God can destroy neighbors.
8. The ambush imagery shifts the wicked person from economic predator (vv. 3-6) to physical predator (vv. 8-10). The progression mirrors the escalation of evil: unchecked greed leads to contempt for God, which leads to violence against the vulnerable. The psalm traces the entire trajectory from arrogance to murder.
9. The double ambush language (*ye'erov... ye'erov*) creates a sense of relentless, patient stalking. The wicked person does not attack in passion but in strategy — he waits, observes, selects, and then strikes. The poor are not random victims but targeted prey, chosen for their vulnerability.
10. The complete portrait (vv. 2-10) traces a coherent psychology of wickedness: arrogance breeds contempt for God, which breeds contempt for people, which breeds predatory violence. The psalm insists that these are not separate sins but a single trajectory — each step follows logically from the previous one.
11. The irony is devastating: the wicked person says 'God will never see' in a psalm where God is called upon to see everything. The psalmist and the wicked person look at the same evidence — God's apparent inaction — and reach opposite conclusions. The psalmist says 'Why are You hiding? Act!' The wicked says 'God doesn't see. I'm free.' Same observation, opposite faith.
12. The petition 'do not forget the afflicted' (*al tishkach anavim*) is the psalm's theological hinge. Psalm 9:13 declared that God 'does not forget the cry of the afflicted.' Psalm 10:11 quoted the wicked's claim that 'God has forgotten.' Psalm 10:12 now asks God to prove the wicked wrong by remembering. The three uses of *shakhach* across the two psalms form a theological argument: God's character (He does not forget) versus the wicked's delusion (God has forgotten) versus the psalmist's prayer (do not forget).
13. The psalmist's strategy here is theologically brilliant: by quoting the wicked person's contempt directly to God, he turns the wicked person's arrogance into a provocation of God's honor. If God does not act, the wicked person's claim — 'You will not investigate' — becomes true. The psalmist is effectively saying: Your reputation is at stake.
14. The orphan (*yatom*) appears throughout the Hebrew Bible as the test case for justice. A society's treatment of orphans reveals its moral character. God's self-identification as 'helper of the orphan' (*ozer yatom*) establishes a divine priority: those without human protectors have a divine one. Deuteronomy 10:18 says God 'executes justice for the orphan and the widow.' Psalm 68:6 calls God 'father of the fatherless.'
15. The prayer to 'break the arm' of the wicked is not vindictive cruelty but a petition for the removal of oppressive power. The arm is the instrument of violence; breaking it ends the violence. The psalmist does not ask for the wicked person's torture but for the termination of his capacity to harm.
16. The declaration *YHWH melekh* ('the LORD is king') anticipates the great enthronement psalms (93, 95-99). It is the Psalter's foundational political theology: all earthly power is subordinate to divine sovereignty. The nations may rage (Psalm 2), the wicked may prosper (Psalm 10), but the LORD remains king. This confession is the Psalter's answer to every form of injustice.
17. The phrase *takhin libbam* ('You steady their hearts') reveals something important about God's care for the afflicted: it is not only external deliverance but internal strengthening. God does not merely rescue the vulnerable from their circumstances but fortifies their inner lives. The heart (*lev*) that has been shaken by oppression is made firm (*kun*) by God.
18. The final line — 'so that mere mortals from the earth may terrify no more' — is the Psalter's most concentrated statement against human tyranny. The tyrant is reduced to his essential identity: *enosh min ha-arets* ('a mortal from the earth, a creature of dust'). When God arises to defend the orphan and the crushed, the pretension of human power is exposed as the fraud it always was. The oppressor who claimed God would never see is himself seen, judged, and stripped of his ability to terrorize.

11

Summary: *A psalm of David expressing defiant trust in the LORD when counseled to flee. The psalmist refuses escape, grounding his confidence in the LORD's heavenly throne and his examination of the righteous and the wicked. The psalm moves from the temptation to run to the certainty of divine justice, ending with the vision of the upright beholding God's face.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The psalm opens with a quotation from fearful advisors — 'Flee to your mountain like a bird' — and then spends the rest of its brief length demolishing the premise behind their advice. The logic is architectural: the LORD is in his holy temple, the LORD's throne is in heaven, therefore the foundations have not been destroyed no matter what the wicked do. The final line — 'the upright will behold his face' — uses the language of temple access and royal audience. To see the face of the king was the highest privilege in the ancient Near East. The psalm promises that the righteous will receive what was denied even to Moses (Exodus 33:20): the direct vision of God.*

Translation Friction: *Verse 3 — 'When the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?' — is ambiguous. It may still be part of the advisors' fearful counsel, or it may be the psalmist's own rhetorical question. The Hebrew ki ('when, if, because') leaves the relationship between verses 2-3 deliberately open. The 'foundations' (shatot) likely refer to the foundations of social and moral order, not literal architecture. The word appears only here and in Psalm 82:5, where it describes the cosmic foundations shaking when justice fails.*

Connections: *The imagery of the LORD testing from his temple connects to Habakkuk 2:20 ('The LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence'). The fire and brimstone judgment on the wicked (v. 6) echoes the destruction of Sodom in Genesis 19:24. The concept of beholding God's face reappears in Psalm 17:15, which closes with almost identical language. The bird-flight metaphor recurs in Psalm 55:6-8, where David wishes for wings to fly away — a wish this psalm refuses.*

¹For the choirmaster. Of David.
In the LORD I have taken refuge.
How can you say to my soul,
'Flee to your mountain like a bird'?

²For look — the wicked bend the bow,
they fit their arrow to the string
to shoot from the shadows
at the upright in heart.

³When the foundations are torn down,
what can the righteous do?

⁴The LORD is in his holy temple;
the LORD — his throne is in heaven.
His eyes observe,
his eyelids examine the children of humanity.

⁵The LORD examines the righteous,
but the wicked and the lover of violence
his soul hates.

⁶He rains down on the wicked
burning coals, fire and sulfur;
a scorching wind is the portion of their cup.

7For the LORD is righteous — he loves righteous deeds.
The upright will behold his face.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. lamnatseach is traditionally rendered 'To the chief musician' (KJV) but more likely means 'for the choirmaster' or 'for the musical director,' indicating the psalm was assigned to the temple music leader for liturgical performance.
1. The verb chasah ('to take refuge') is distinct from batach ('to trust'). It implies active movement toward shelter — not passive confidence but deliberate flight to God rather than to the mountains. The wordplay is intentional: the advisors say 'flee' (nudi), but the psalmist has already fled — to the LORD.
2. The phrase be-mo ofel ('in/from darkness') indicates covert attack — the wicked operate in concealment, ambushing those who live openly. The 'upright in heart' (yishrei lev) describes people whose inner disposition is straight and honest, making them vulnerable to those who operate by deception.
2. This verse may still be part of the advisors' speech — they describe the danger to justify their counsel to flee. The ki hinneh ('for look!') adds urgency to their warning.
3. The word shatot ('foundations') occurs only here and in Psalm 82:5 in the entire Hebrew Bible. In Psalm 82 the foundations of the earth totter because divine judges have failed to do justice. The same concept applies here: when the structures that uphold justice collapse, the righteous seem powerless.
3. Some interpreters read this verse as still quoting the advisors (making vv. 1c-3 a single quotation). Others see it as the psalmist's own question, answered by vv. 4-7. The ambiguity may be intentional.
4. The word af'appayim ('eyelids') is unusual in describing divine sight. It may suggest the narrowing of eyes in intense scrutiny, or it may be a poetic parallel for 'eyes' without additional meaning. The image is anthropomorphic but functions to convey the thoroughness of divine observation.
4. heikhal can mean both 'temple' and 'palace' — the ambiguity is productive, since the LORD's temple is also his throne room. The heavenly temple and the earthly sanctuary are linked in Israelite theology.
5. The phrase sane'ah nafsho ('his soul hates') is among the strongest expressions of divine disapproval in the Psalter. nefesh here means the essential self, the core of God's being. This is not casual dislike but visceral rejection.
5. chamas ('violence') is the same word used in Genesis 6:11 to describe the corruption that provoked the flood. It denotes not merely physical force but the violation of social bonds, the breakdown of trust between human beings.
6. pachim is difficult. It may mean 'snares, traps' (from pach) or 'burning coals' (from pecham). The context of fire and sulfur favors 'burning coals,' but the ambiguity may be intentional — the wicked are both trapped and burned.
6. The 'cup' (kos) as a metaphor for divine judgment appears in Isaiah 51:17, Jeremiah 25:15, and Psalm 75:8. It conveys inevitability: you must drink what is poured for you.
7. The final line is grammatically ambiguous: fanemo could mean 'his face' (God's face that the upright behold) or 'their face' (God beholds the face of the upright). Most Hebrew scholars read it as 'his face' — the upright will see God. This reading provides the climactic reversal: the psalm began with the temptation to flee God's world, and it ends with the promise of seeing God's face.
7. The shift from God examining humanity (v. 4) to humanity beholding God (v. 7) creates a reciprocal gaze — God sees us, and we will see God. This mutual vision is the psalm's definition of the covenant relationship.

12

Summary: A psalm of David lamenting the disappearance of the faithful and the dominance of flattering, deceitful speech. The psalmist cries out for God to act against those who use smooth lips and a double heart. At the center stands a divine oracle: the LORD himself speaks, promising to rise and protect the poor. The psalm then contrasts human words — false, silver-tongued, manipulative — with the words of the LORD, which are pure silver refined seven times.

What Makes This Remarkable: This psalm is structured around the opposition between two kinds of speech. Human speech in the first half is characterized by duplicity: smooth lips (sifatei chalaqot) and a double heart (lev va-lev, literally 'a heart and a heart'). The wicked speak with two hearts — one visible, one hidden. Against this verbal corruption, the psalm places the words of the LORD (imrot YHVH), which are pure (tehorot), refined like silver smelted seven times. The number seven signals complete purification: God's words contain no alloy, no hidden agenda, no double meaning. The

psalm is essentially a meditation on the trustworthiness of language itself — and concludes that only divine speech can be trusted without reservation.

Translation Friction: *Verse 7 in the Hebrew (v. 6 in some English translations) contains the divine oracle — 'Now I will arise, says the LORD' — which interrupts the psalm with God's own voice. This is unusual in the Psalter; most psalms address God or speak about God, but here God speaks directly within the poem. The shift is jarring and powerful. The placement of the oracle at the psalm's center suggests that divine speech is the hinge on which the entire structure turns. Some scholars see this as a prophetic oracle delivered in the temple liturgy, with a priest or prophet speaking God's words during worship.*

Connections: *The 'pure words' metaphor (v. 7) connects to Proverbs 30:5 ('Every word of God is refined') and Psalm 119:140 ('Your word is very pure'). The imagery of silver refined seven times appears nowhere else in Scripture, making it a unique intensification. The lament over the disappearance of the faithful (chasid) echoes Micah 7:2 ('The faithful have perished from the earth'). The promise that the LORD will arise (aqum) uses the same verb as the ark procession formula in Numbers 10:35 ('Arise, O LORD').*

¹For the choirmaster. On the sheminith. A psalm of David.
²Save us, LORD, for the faithful are gone!
 The trustworthy have vanished
 from among the children of humanity.
³They speak emptiness to one another,
 with smooth lips and a double heart they speak.
⁴May the LORD cut off all smooth lips,
 the tongue that speaks boastfully —
⁵those who say, 'With our tongue we will prevail!
 Our lips are with us —
 who is master over us?'
⁶'Because the poor are plundered,
 because the needy groan,
 now I will arise,' declares the LORD.
 'I will place him in the safety he longs for.'
⁷The words of the LORD are pure words,
 like silver refined in a furnace on the ground,
 purified seven times.
⁸You, LORD, will guard them;
 you will protect us from this generation forever.
⁹The wicked prowl on every side
 when worthlessness is exalted among the children of humanity.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. sheminith means 'the eighth' and likely refers to a musical mode, tuning, or an eight-stringed instrument. The exact meaning is lost. Some suggest it indicates a lower octave or bass register, which would suit the somber tone of this lament.
2. chasid ('the faithful one') derives from chesed and describes a person who practices covenant loyalty. It is the human counterpart to God's own chesed. When the chasid disappears, the covenant community loses its essential character.

3. The phrase *lev va-lev* ('a heart and a heart') is one of the most concise descriptions of hypocrisy in the Hebrew Bible. It does not mean indecision (as in James 1:8, 'double-minded') but active duplicity — maintaining two simultaneous intentions, one public and one private.
4. The verb *yakhret* ('may he cut off') carries covenantal overtones — *karat* is the verb used for both making and breaking covenants. To be 'cut off' is to be severed from the community and from God's protection. The smooth lips and boastful tongue will be surgically removed from the body politic.
5. The boast *mi adon lanu* ('who is lord over us?') echoes the primal human impulse toward autonomy. It is not atheism — it is practical lordlessness, the refusal to acknowledge any authority that constrains speech or action.
6. This is one of the rare places in the Psalter where God speaks directly in the first person within a psalm. The oracle format — 'says the LORD' (*yomar YHVH*) — is typically prophetic, suggesting this psalm may have been performed with a priestly or prophetic voice delivering God's words in the liturgy.
6. The final phrase *yapiyach lo* is difficult. It may mean 'he pants for it' (the poor man longs for safety) or 'he [the oppressor] puffs at him' (the enemy sneers). We follow the reading that emphasizes the longing of the afflicted.
7. The phrase *ba-alil la-arets* is notoriously difficult. *alil* may mean 'crucible' or 'furnace,' and *la-arets* may mean 'on the ground' (describing the location of the smelting operation) or may modify the refining process. The overall sense is clear even if the details are debated: God's words undergo the most thorough purification imaginable.
8. The shift from 'them' (*tishmerem*) to 'us' (*titserenu*, though some read 'him') reflects the movement from the general promise to personal application. The 'generation' (*dor*) here means the current corrupt generation described in vv. 2-5 — the generation of smooth lips and double hearts.
9. The final verse is one of the most debated in the Psalter. *ke-rum zullut* could mean 'when vileness is exalted' or 'according to the exaltation of worthlessness.' The overall sense is that a society that elevates what is base creates conditions for the wicked to flourish. The psalm refuses to end with easy resolution — it acknowledges ongoing tension between God's promise and present reality.

13

Summary: *One of the purest lament psalms in the Psalter — six verses that move through three distinct emotional stages with architectural precision. The psalmist asks 'How long?' four times (vv. 2-3), pleads for God to look and answer (vv. 4-5), then erupts into trust and praise (v. 6). The entire emotional arc of the lament genre — distress, petition, confidence — is compressed into the smallest possible space.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The fourfold 'How long?' (ad anah) in verses 2-3 is one of the most imitated structures in the history of prayer. Each question targets a different dimension of suffering: How long will you forget me? (divine absence), How long will you hide your face? (divine concealment), How long must I wrestle with my thoughts? (internal anguish), How long will my enemy triumph? (external threat). The questions spiral from God to self to enemy, mapping the complete landscape of despair. Then — without any reported answer from God, without any change in circumstances — the psalm pivots to trust in verse 6. This pivot is the mystery at the heart of biblical lament: the act of crying out to God is itself the bridge from despair to praise. Nothing changes except the direction of the psalmist's gaze.*

Translation Friction: *The transition from verse 5 ('lest my enemy say, I have prevailed') to verse 6 ('But I trust in your faithful love') is one of the sharpest turns in the Psalter. There is no intervening oracle, no divine response, no change in situation. Some scholars attribute this to a liturgical pause — perhaps a priest spoke an oracle of assurance between verses 5 and 6 that the text does not record. Others see it as the essential structure of faith: lament that is directed toward God already contains the seeds of trust, because the act of addressing God presupposes his existence, his power, and his willingness to hear.*

Connections: *The fourfold 'How long?' echoes Habakkuk 1:2 and Revelation 6:10, forming a thread that runs from the Psalms through the prophets to the apocalypse. The final verse's movement from trust (*batachti*) to rejoicing (*yagel libbi*) to singing (*ashirah*) anticipates the full trajectory of Psalm 30, which moves from mourning to dancing. The phrase 'he has dealt generously with me' (*gamal alay*) will reappear in Psalm 116:7, connecting this brief lament to the great thanksgiving psalms.*

For the choirmaster. A psalm of David.

²How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?

³How long must I wrestle with my thoughts,
with grief in my heart day after day?
How long will my enemy be exalted over me?

⁴Look at me! Answer me, LORD my God!
Give light to my eyes,
or I will sleep the sleep of death.

⁵Do not let my enemy say, 'I have prevailed over him!'
Do not let my foes rejoice when I stumble.

⁶But I have trusted in your faithful love;
my heart will rejoice in your salvation.
I will sing to the LORD,
for he has dealt generously with me.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The superscription is minimal — no musical or situational notation beyond the standard attribution to David and the choirmaster. The simplicity of the heading matches the compressed intensity of the psalm itself.
2. The phrase *hester panim* ('hiding of the face') is a technical theological concept. When God turns his face toward someone, it means blessing and life (Numbers 6:25). When he hides his face, it means exposure to chaos and death. The psalmist is asking: have you turned away permanently?
3. The fourfold repetition of *ad anah* creates a hammering rhythm in Hebrew that formal English translation struggles to reproduce. The questions are not rhetorical — they demand an answer. Their repetition is itself a form of prayer: the persistence of the question is the persistence of faith.
4. The title 'LORD my God' (YHVH Elohai) is significant — in the midst of feeling abandoned, the psalmist still claims God as his own. The possessive 'my' is an act of faith embedded in the petition. He addresses the God who seems absent as 'my God.'
5. The psalmist appeals to God's honor: if the enemy prevails, it reflects not only on the psalmist but on the God who was supposed to protect him. This appeal to divine reputation is a common strategy in biblical lament — Moses uses it in Numbers 14:13-16, arguing that the nations will interpret Israel's destruction as God's inability to save.
6. The movement from lament (vv. 2-3) through petition (vv. 4-5) to praise (v. 6) is the classic three-part structure of the biblical lament. What makes Psalm 13 remarkable is that this entire arc occurs in six verses. The compression intensifies every transition.
6. The verb *gamal* ('to deal with, to repay, to wean') implies completion — God has brought something to its full development. The psalmist trusts that God's dealing with him will end in generosity, not abandonment.

14

Summary: *A wisdom psalm that begins with the fool's declaration — "There is no God" — and then surveys the resulting moral catastrophe. The LORD looks down from heaven to see if anyone acts wisely, and the verdict is universal: all have turned aside, all are corrupt, no one does good. The psalm names the wicked as those who 'devour my people like bread' and who shame the counsel of the poor. It ends with a longing cry for salvation to come from Zion.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The fool's statement — 'there is no God' (ein Elohim) — is not philosophical atheism in the modern sense. The fool ('fool') is not making a metaphysical argument but a practical one: God is not present, God does not see, God will not act. This is functional atheism — living as though God's moral governance does not apply. The psalm's response is to describe God doing exactly what the fool denies: looking down (*hishqif*), observing (*lir'ot*), examining whether anyone seeks God (*doresh et Elohim*). The irony is precise: the fool says God is absent, and at that very moment God is watching the fool. The universal verdict — 'all have turned aside, together they are corrupt'*

(hakkol sar yachdav ne'elachu) — will be quoted by Paul in Romans 3:10-12 as evidence of universal human sinfulness.

Translation Friction: *Verse 4 suddenly narrows from universal corruption to a specific accusation: 'those who devour my people as they eat bread.' The shift from 'all have turned aside' to 'those who devour my people' introduces a distinction the psalm seemed to deny — if all are corrupt, who are 'my people' being devoured? The phrase ammi ('my people') likely represents God's voice (as in a prophetic oracle) or the psalmist speaking as God's representative. The tension between universal corruption and the existence of an identifiable righteous remnant (the poor in v. 6, the generation of the righteous in v. 5) runs through the entire psalm without resolution.*

Connections: *Psalm 53 is a near-duplicate of Psalm 14 with minor variations, including the substitution of Elohim for YHVH — evidence that the psalm circulated in two traditions. Paul's quotation in Romans 3:10-18 draws from the Greek Septuagint version, which expands the indictment significantly. The phrase 'salvation out of Zion' (yeshu'at Yisrael mi-Tsiyyon) connects to Psalm 53:6, Isaiah 59:20 ('A redeemer will come to Zion'), and Romans 11:26. The image of God looking down from heaven appears also in Psalm 33:13-14 and Genesis 11:5 (the Tower of Babel).*

¹For the choirmaster. Of David.

The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'

They are corrupt; their deeds are vile.

There is no one who does good.

²The LORD looks down from heaven

on the children of humanity

to see if there is anyone who acts wisely,

anyone who seeks God.

³All have turned aside; together they have become corrupt.

There is no one who does good —

not even one.

⁴Do they not know, all these workers of evil —

those who devour my people as they eat bread,

who do not call on the LORD?

⁵There they are — utterly terrified!

For God is with the generation of the righteous.

⁶You would shame the plans of the poor,

but the LORD is their refuge.

⁷Oh, that salvation for Israel would come from Zion!

When the LORD restores the fortunes of his people,

Jacob will rejoice; Israel will be glad.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. naval does not mean 'fool' in the sense of intellectual deficiency. It describes a person who is morally senseless — who refuses to reckon with reality as it actually is. Nabal in 1 Samuel 25 is the narrative embodiment of this concept: a wealthy man who acts as though generosity and justice do not apply to him.
1. The plural 'they are corrupt' follows the singular 'the fool says' — the psalm moves from one fool's inner conviction to its social consequences. One person's functional atheism becomes a civilization's moral collapse.

2. The verb *darash* ('to seek, inquire, investigate') implies effort and intentionality. Seeking God is not passive — it requires turning one's attention, inquiry, and desire toward God. The absence of seekers is as damning as the absence of doers.
3. Paul quotes this verse in Romans 3:12, using it to establish universal human sinfulness before introducing justification by faith. In its original context, the psalm's universal indictment exists in tension with the 'generation of the righteous' mentioned in verse 5 — the psalm seems to both deny and assume the existence of a faithful remnant.
4. The transition from 'all have turned aside' (universal) to 'those who devour my people' (specific) implies a distinction within the universal corruption. The 'my people' language suggests a prophetic voice — God speaking through the psalmist about those who prey on the poor and faithful.
5. The phrase *dor tsaddiq* ('generation of the righteous') introduces a category that seems to contradict the universal corruption of verse 3. This tension is not resolved within the psalm — it reflects the biblical pattern of universal judgment coexisting with a faithful remnant.
6. The shift to second person ('you would shame') makes the accusation direct and personal. The 'counsel' or 'plan' (*etsah*) of the poor likely refers to their trust in God — the wicked mock the poor for relying on a God who seems absent. The psalm's reply: the LORD is *machsheh* ('his refuge') — the same shelter-language used in Psalm 11:1.
7. The phrase *shuv shevut* (or *shivat*) is debated: does it mean 'restore fortunes' (from *shuv*, 'to return') or 'return captivity' (from *shavah*, 'to take captive')? Both meanings work theologically — God either restores what was lost or brings back those who were taken away. The broader sense of total restoration is likely intended.

15

Summary: *An entrance liturgy that asks and answers the question: Who may dwell in God's presence? The psalm opens with a question addressed to the LORD — who may sojourn in your tent, who may dwell on your holy mountain? — and then provides a ten-part ethical profile of the person qualified for divine access. The answer is entirely moral, not ritual: the one who walks with integrity, speaks truth, refuses slander, keeps oaths even at personal cost, and does not exploit the vulnerable through usury or bribery.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The psalm's answer to 'Who may approach God?' contains no mention of sacrifice, no ritual requirement, no priestly qualification. The entrance requirements are entirely ethical. This is striking in a temple context, where one might expect purity laws or sacrificial prerequisites. Instead, the psalm describes a person characterized by integrity of conduct, truthful speech, loyal relationships, and economic justice. The structure — question (v. 1), ethical catalog (vv. 2-5b), promise (v. 5c) — mirrors the entrance liturgy format found also in Psalm 24:3-6 and Isaiah 33:14-16. The ten ethical qualities may intentionally echo the Ten Commandments, creating an 'entrance decalogue' for the sanctuary.*

Translation Friction: *The prohibition against lending at interest (*neshekh*, v. 5) reflects the Torah's economic legislation in Exodus 22:25 and Leviticus 25:36-37, which forbade interest on loans to fellow Israelites (especially the poor). This was not a prohibition on all commerce but a protection against the exploitation of the vulnerable. In an agrarian economy, interest-bearing loans to the poor were a mechanism of dispossession — they transferred land and labor from the desperate to the wealthy. The psalm treats this economic practice as a disqualification from God's presence, placing it alongside bribery and slander as barriers to worship.*

Connections: *Psalm 24:3-6 asks the same entrance question and provides a parallel answer focused on clean hands and pure heart. Isaiah 33:14-16 adapts the form for a prophetic context. Ezekiel 18:5-9 expands the ethical catalog into a legal case study. The 'tent' (*ohel*) and 'holy mountain' (*har qodesh*) of verse 1 link to the wilderness tabernacle and to Mount Zion — God's portable and permanent dwellings respectively. The promise of the final line — 'the one who does these things will never be shaken' — uses the same verb (*mot*) that appears in Psalm 16:8, connecting the two psalms thematically.*

¹A psalm of David.

LORD, who may sojourn in your tent?

Who may dwell on your holy mountain?

²The one who walks with integrity,
who practices righteousness,
and speaks truth in their heart.

³They do not slander with their tongue,
do no evil to their neighbor,
and bring no reproach against their close companion.

⁴In their eyes the reprobate is despised,
but they honor those who fear the LORD.
They swear to their own harm and do not go back on their word.

⁵They do not lend their money at interest,
nor accept a bribe against the innocent.
Whoever does these things will never be shaken.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The 'tent' (ohel) recalls the wilderness tabernacle — God's portable dwelling among his people during the exodus. The 'holy mountain' (har qodesh) is Zion, where the temple stands. Together they span Israel's entire history of divine presence: the wandering tent and the settled mountain.
2. tamim ('integrity, wholeness') is the same word used to describe Noah (Genesis 6:9) and the sacrificial animal without blemish (Leviticus 1:3). The word connects moral integrity to ritual completeness — a life without hidden defect, like an offering without flaw.
3. The verb ragal ('to go about, to spy, to slander') literally means 'to foot it' — to go around peddling harmful speech about others. The three negatives in this verse define the ethical person by what they refuse to do: no malicious speech, no harmful action, no shaming of those close to them. The word qarov ('near one, close companion') intensifies the requirement — it is especially those nearest to us whom we must protect from reproach.
4. The phrase nishba le-hara ve-lo yamir ('swears to his own harm and does not change') is one of the most ethically demanding statements in the Psalter. It describes a person for whom their word is more valuable than their comfort, wealth, or advantage. The verb yamir (from mur, 'to change, exchange') means they will not swap out their commitment for a more convenient one.
5. neshekh ('interest, usury') literally means 'a bite' — the image is of money that bites back, consuming the borrower. In the ancient world, interest-bearing loans to the poor were instruments of dispossession. The prohibition protects community solidarity against the centrifugal force of economic exploitation.
5. The final promise — 'will never be shaken' (lo yimmot le-olam) — does not promise prosperity or ease. It promises stability, rootedness, an unshakeable foundation. This is the same verb used in Psalm 16:8 ('I will not be shaken') and Psalm 46:5 ('it will not be shaken').

16

Summary: A miktam of David expressing radical satisfaction in God as the psalmist's sole inheritance and portion. The psalm moves from a plea for protection through a confession of exclusive devotion to the LORD, past a rejection of other gods, into the language of deep contentment — the boundary lines have fallen in pleasant places. It culminates in one of the most extraordinary statements in the Hebrew Bible: 'You will not abandon my soul to Sheol, nor let your faithful one see the pit.' The psalm ends with the vision of fullness of joy in God's presence and pleasures at his right hand forever.

What Makes This Remarkable: Psalm 16 is unique in the Psalter for its sustained tone of quiet, untroubled confidence. There is no lament, no enemy, no crisis to resolve. The psalm is pure satisfaction — the contentment of a person who has found that God is enough. The language of inheritance runs through the entire poem: the LORD is 'my portion' (chelqi) and 'my cup' (kosi), and the 'boundary lines' (chavalim) have fallen in pleasant places. This is land-allotment language: when Israel divided Canaan, each tribe received its nachalah ('inheritance, allotted portion'). The Levites received no land — their inheritance was the LORD himself (Numbers 18:20, Deuteronomy 10:9). The psalmist adopts Levitical theology and makes it personal: my allotted portion is not a field or a vineyard but God

himself. Verse 10 — 'you will not abandon my soul to Sheol' — becomes one of the most theologically generative verses in the Hebrew Bible. Peter quotes it in Acts 2:25-28 as a prophecy of Christ's resurrection, arguing that David spoke of someone whose body would not see corruption.

Translation Friction: Verses 3-4 are among the most textually difficult in the Psalter. The Hebrew is compressed and possibly corrupt. The general sense — that the psalmist delights in the 'holy ones' (qedoshim) who are in the land while rejecting those who chase after other gods — is clear, but the grammar resists smooth translation. The word *atstabotam* (v. 4) may mean 'their sorrows' or 'their idols' (from *etsev*, 'pain/idol'). The phrase 'I will not pour out their drink offerings of blood' suggests rejection of pagan rituals involving blood libations. Verse 10's claim about not being abandoned to Sheol pushes against the dominant Old Testament understanding that all the dead go to Sheol regardless of righteousness. The psalm seems to reach toward something beyond the standard view — a hope that the relationship with God is strong enough to survive death itself.

Connections: The inheritance language connects to Numbers 18:20 (the Levites' portion) and Psalm 73:26 ('God is the portion of my heart forever'). Peter's quotation of vv. 8-11 in Acts 2:25-31 makes this psalm central to early Christian resurrection theology. Paul cites verse 10 in Acts 13:35 with the same interpretive move. The 'path of life' (*orach chayyim*, v. 11) reappears in Proverbs 5:6 and 15:24. The 'pleasures at your right hand forever' (v. 11) echoes Psalm 110:1, where the king sits at God's right hand.

¹A miktam of David.

Protect me, God, for I have taken refuge in you.

²I said to the LORD, 'You are my Lord;
I have no good apart from you.'

³As for the holy ones in the land,
they are the noble ones in whom is all my delight.

⁴The sorrows of those who chase after another god will multiply.
I will not pour out their drink offerings of blood,
nor will I take their names on my lips.

⁵The LORD is my allotted portion and my cup;
you hold my lot secure.

⁶The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
yes, my inheritance is beautiful to me.

⁷I bless the LORD who counsels me;
even in the night my inner being instructs me.

⁸I have set the LORD before me always;
because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

⁹Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices;
even my body rests secure.

¹⁰For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol,
nor will you let your faithful one see the pit.

¹¹You make known to me the path of life;
in your presence is fullness of joy,

at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. *miktam* appears six times in the Psalter (Psalms 16, 56-60) and nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible. The Septuagint translates it as *stelographia* ('inscription on a pillar'). The meaning remains uncertain, but the word may relate to *ketem* ('gold') or to *katam* ('to cover, conceal').
2. The Hebrew of this verse is among the most debated in the Psalter. The second-person feminine form *amarte* is unusual (either an archaic form or addressed to the psalmist's own soul). The phrase *tovati bal alekha* has generated at least four major interpretive traditions. Our rendering follows the dominant reading: 'I have no good apart from you.'
3. The identity of the *qedoshim* ('holy ones') is debated. They may be human saints (faithful Israelites), heavenly beings (as in some readings of Deuteronomy 33:2-3), or both. The context — 'in the land' (*ba-arets*) — favors human referents: the faithful community in Israel.
4. The phrase *niskeihem mi-dam* ('their drink offerings of blood') likely refers to pagan rituals involving blood libations, which were forbidden in Israelite worship. Some scholars see this as a reference to human sacrifice or to rituals involving the mingling of blood with wine in the drink offering.
4. The ambiguity of *atsvotam* ('their sorrows' or 'their idols') is productive: pursuing false gods generates both — the idols themselves and the misery they bring.
5. The four inheritance terms (*menat*, *cheleq*, *kos*, *goral*) are drawn from the concrete world of land allotment and applied to the relationship with God. This is not abstract theology but economic metaphor: the psalmist's wealth, security, and future are invested entirely in God.
6. *chavalim* ('lines, ropes, measuring cords') comes from the practice of dividing land with ropes. The idiom 'the lines have fallen' means 'my portion has been assigned.' The image is of a person standing on their newly measured property, looking around, and finding it genuinely delightful.
7. *kilyot* ('kidneys') as the seat of deep thought and emotion appears in Jeremiah 17:10 ('I the LORD search the heart and examine the kidneys') and Psalm 139:13 ('you formed my kidneys'). Translating as 'inner being' preserves the function while avoiding the anatomical literalism.
8. The phrase *shivviti YHVH le-negdi tamid* became so central to Jewish spirituality that it was inscribed on plaques (called *shivviti* plaques) hung in synagogues and homes as a visual reminder to keep God constantly in view.
9. *kevod* ('glory') as a term for the human soul or essential self appears also in Psalm 7:5 and 57:8. The Septuagint translates it as 'my tongue' (*glossa*), perhaps reading *kavod* as *kaved* ('liver'). Peter's quotation in Acts 2:26 follows the Septuagint: 'my tongue rejoiced.'
10. *She'ol* in the Hebrew Bible is not hell in the later Christian sense. It is the shadowy underworld where all the dead go — not a place of punishment for the wicked but the default destination of all who die. The psalm's remarkable claim is not that the psalmist avoids punishment but that the psalmist avoids the normal fate of all humanity: descent into *She'ol*.
10. *shachat* can mean 'pit' (a place) or 'corruption, decay' (a process). The Septuagint translates it as *diaphthora* ('corruption, decay'), which becomes theologically significant in Peter's argument in Acts 2:31 — David's body did see decay, but the one David prophesied about did not.
11. The progression from 'path of life' to 'fullness of joy' to 'pleasures forever' creates an escalating trajectory that carries the reader beyond the boundaries of this life into something that sounds like eternal communion with God. Whether the original psalmist understood this as life after death in the later theological sense is debated, but the language strains toward a reality that death cannot contain.
11. This verse has been called the high-water mark of Old Testament hope. It does not describe survival after death in explicit terms, but it describes a relationship with God so full, so joyful, and so permanent that death seems unable to interrupt it.

17

Summary: A prayer of David that functions as a legal appeal to God as judge. The psalmist opens by asserting his innocence — his lips, his steps, his heart have been tested and found without deceit — and then petitions God for protection from deadly enemies who are closing in. The imagery builds from legal defense to military siege to predatory lions. The psalm reaches its climax in the final verse with one of the most intimate statements of hope in the Psalter: 'As for me, I will behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I will be satisfied with your likeness.'

*What Makes This Remarkable: The psalm's final verse (v. 15) stands in deliberate contrast to verse 14, which describes the wicked satisfied with earthly abundance — their bellies filled, their children inheriting their surplus. Against this picture of material satiety, the psalmist offers a radically different definition of satisfaction: 'I will be satisfied with your likeness' (*esbe'ah be-haqits temunatekha*). The word *temunah* ('form, likeness, appearance') is the same word used in Numbers 12:8, where God says Moses beholds 'the form of the LORD.' The psalmist's ultimate satisfaction is not in possessions, descendants, or long life but in seeing God. This verse, together with Psalm 16:11, represents the*

highest reach of the Psalter's theology of divine presence.

Translation Friction: The psalmist's claims of innocence in verses 3-5 are remarkably strong: 'You have tested my heart... you find nothing... my mouth does not transgress... I have kept from the paths of the violent.' This language troubles readers who expect all biblical figures to acknowledge sinfulness. The innocence claimed here is not absolute moral perfection but covenantal integrity — the psalmist has not committed the specific crimes of which enemies accuse him. This is legal language: I am not guilty of what they charge. The claims should be read as courtroom defense, not as theological assertion of sinlessness.

Connections: The final verse ('I will behold your face in righteousness') directly echoes Psalm 11:7 ('the upright will behold his face') and anticipates the 'beatific vision' theology that develops through the biblical tradition. The phrase be-haqits ('when I awake') connects to Daniel 12:2, where the dead 'awake' to everlasting life. The lion imagery (vv. 11-12) appears also in Psalm 10:9 and 22:13, linking these psalms in their portrait of predatory enemies. The 'apple of the eye' (ishon bat ayin, v. 8) reappears in Deuteronomy 32:10 and Proverbs 7:2.

¹A prayer of David.

Hear a just cause, LORD; attend to my cry.

Give ear to my prayer —

it comes from lips without deceit.

²Let my vindication come from your presence;

let your eyes see what is right.

³You have tested my heart, visited me in the night;

you have refined me — you will find nothing.

I have resolved that my mouth will not transgress.

⁴As for human deeds — by the word of your lips

I have avoided the paths of the violent.

⁵My steps have held firm to your paths;

my feet have not slipped.

⁶I call on you, for you will answer me, God.

Incline your ear to me; hear my words.

⁷Show the wonder of your faithful love,

O savior of those who take refuge

at your right hand from their adversaries.

⁸Guard me like the pupil of the eye;

hide me in the shadow of your wings.

⁹from the wicked who assail me,

from my deadly enemies who surround me.

¹⁰They close up their callous hearts;

their mouths speak with arrogance.

¹¹They track our every step; they surround us.

They fix their eyes to cast us to the ground.

¹²He is like a lion eager to tear its prey,
like a young lion crouching in ambush.

¹³Rise up, LORD! Confront him; bring him down!
Rescue my soul from the wicked — your sword!

¹⁴From mortals — by your hand, LORD! —
from mortals whose portion is in this life alone.
You fill their bellies with your hidden treasure;
they are satisfied with children
and leave their surplus to their little ones.

¹⁵As for me — in righteousness I will behold your face;
when I awake, I will be satisfied with your likeness.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The three verbs for hearing (shama, qashav, azan) create a rhetorical escalation: hear, attend, give ear. Each adds urgency. The legal overtone of tsedeq ('a just cause') sets the psalm in the framework of a court appeal — the psalmist is bringing a case before the divine judge.
2. mishpati ('my judgment, my sentence, my vindication') is legal terminology — the verdict the psalmist seeks from God's court. The psalmist is confident: he wants God to judge because he believes God's eyes will see mesharim ('uprightness, equity, what is straight'). He invites divine scrutiny rather than fearing it.
3. The nighttime visitation (paqadta lailah) suggests God's examination during the vulnerable hours when conscious defenses are down — in dreams, in the anxious hours of sleeplessness. Even there, God finds nothing. The three-fold testing echoes Psalm 12:6's image of silver refined in a furnace.
4. The psalmist credits God's word (davar sefatekha, 'the word of your lips') as the guide that kept him from the paths of the parits ('violent one, robber, breaker-through'). The contrast is between two kinds of speech: God's word that directs toward righteousness, and the smooth words of the wicked that lead to violence.
5. The verb tamakh ('to hold, support, grasp') can be read as either a past declaration ('my steps have held firm') or a petition ('hold up my steps'). The ambiguity allows both: the psalmist affirms past faithfulness and implicitly asks for continued support. The 'paths' (ma'gelot) are God's established tracks — the grooves worn by walking in God's way.
6. The ki ('for, because') expresses confidence: I call because I know you will answer. The verb anah ('to answer, respond') implies not just hearing but active response. The psalmist's prayer is not cast into a void but directed toward a God with a proven record of answering.
7. The verb hafleh ('make wonderful, distinguish') asks for chesed that is not ordinary but spectacular — an act of faithful love so striking it cannot be attributed to coincidence or human effort.
8. ishon bat ayin ('the little man of the daughter of the eye') is the Hebrew idiom for the pupil. The layered metaphor — a little person reflected inside the eye — suggests that God keeps the psalmist so close that the psalmist is reflected in God's own gaze.
9. The phrase oyevai be-nefesh ('my enemies in/against the soul') can mean 'my mortal enemies' (enemies who seek my life) or 'my enemies in soul' (enemies at the deepest level). The verb yaqifu ('they surround, encircle') creates the image of a military siege — the psalmist is hemmed in on all sides.
10. chelbamo sagru ('their fat they close') — chelev ('fat') metaphorically represents a heart grown insensitive through prosperity and self-indulgence. A fat-enclosed heart cannot feel compassion. The image is of people whose comfort has made them cruel — well-fed, self-satisfied, and indifferent to the suffering they inflict.
11. The shift to first person plural ('our steps,' 'surround us') may indicate that the psalmist speaks for a group, or it may be a stylistic variation. The enemies' eyes are set (yashitu) with fixed intent — like a predator locking onto prey before striking. The phrase lintot ba-arets ('to cast down to the earth') describes throwing the victim to the ground.
12. The lion is the standard metaphor for a powerful, predatory enemy in the Psalms (7:2, 10:9, 22:13, 22:21). The doubling — mature lion and young lion — emphasizes that the threat combines experience and vigor.
13. The imperative qumah ('rise up!') echoes Numbers 10:35 and Psalm 12:5 — the war cry for God to take action. The phrase me-rasha charbbekha ('from the wicked — your sword') is ambiguous: is the wicked one God's sword (an instrument of divine testing) or does the psalmist ask to be rescued from the wicked by God's sword? Both readings have support.

14. The interpretation of this verse is heavily debated. Some read it as describing God's judgment on the wicked (from the dead, by your hand, LORD!). Others read it as describing the wicked's earthly prosperity, which is real but ultimately limited to 'this life.' We follow the second reading, which creates the contrast with verse 15's eternal satisfaction.
15. *temunah* ('form, likeness') is the word used in Numbers 12:8 for what Moses sees when God speaks to him face to face — 'the form of the LORD.' It is also the word used in Deuteronomy 4:12, 15-16 to describe what Israel did not see at Sinai (and must not make into an image). The psalm promises the psalmist will see what Israel was denied and warned against replicating.
15. The tension between *be-haqits* ('when I awake') and the rest of the psalm's legal framework has generated enormous theological reflection. Does it refer to waking from literal sleep (the psalmist prays at night and expects to see God in the morning)? From the sleep of death (resurrection hope)? From the night of suffering (eschatological awakening)? The ambiguity may be the point — the psalm's language is capacious enough for all three readings.

18

Summary: *A royal thanksgiving psalm of David celebrating deliverance from all enemies and from Saul. At 51 verses (WLC versification), it is one of the longest psalms in the Psalter and also appears with minor variations as 2 Samuel 22. The psalm moves through four major sections: a cascade of divine titles (vv. 2-4), a cosmic theophany in which God rends heaven to rescue the psalmist (vv. 5-20), a declaration of the psalmist's righteousness and God's corresponding faithfulness (vv. 21-31), and a celebration of military victory that leads to dominion over nations (vv. 32-51). The language is extravagant, mythic, and deeply personal — the God who splits the heavens is the same God who trains the psalmist's hands for war.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The theophany section (vv. 8-16) is among the most powerful descriptions of divine intervention in all of Scripture. The earth shakes, the mountains tremble, smoke rises from God's nostrils, fire devours from his mouth, he bows the heavens and descends, riding on a cherub, flying on the wings of the wind. This is not metaphor in the decorative sense — it is the language of Sinai (Exodus 19:16-18) transferred from national revelation to personal rescue. The same God who appeared in fire and earthquake to give the Torah appears now to save one man from his enemies. The psalm collapses the distance between cosmic event and individual experience, insisting that the God of Sinai is the God of David's bedroom and battlefield.*

Translation Friction: *The psalm's claims of righteousness (vv. 21-25) are even more extensive than Psalm 17's — 'The LORD rewarded me according to my righteousness... I was blameless before him and kept myself from guilt.' Given what the Books of Samuel report about David's life (Bathsheba, Uriah, the census), these claims require contextual reading. The superscription dates the psalm to deliverance from 'all his enemies and from Saul' — likely the early years of David's reign before the events of 2 Samuel 11. The righteousness claimed is relative to the specific conflict with Saul: David did not kill the LORD's anointed when he had the chance. The claims are covenantal and situational, not autobiographical in the absolute sense.*

Connections: *The near-duplicate in 2 Samuel 22 places this psalm within the historical narrative, making it one of the few psalms with a secure narrative context. The theophany echoes Exodus 19, Judges 5:4-5 (the Song of Deborah), and Habakkuk 3:3-15. The divine warrior imagery connects to the Song of the Sea (Exodus 15). The concluding messianic note — 'He shows faithful love to his anointed, to David and his offspring forever' (v. 51) — links this psalm to the Davidic covenant of 2 Samuel 7 and to the messianic hope that runs through the Psalter.*

¹For the choirmaster. Of David, the servant of the LORD, who spoke to the LORD the words of this song on the day the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. He said: ²I love you, LORD, my strength.

³The LORD is my rock, my fortress, my deliverer,
my God, my cliff in whom I take refuge,
my shield, the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

⁴I call on the LORD, who is worthy of praise,
and I am saved from my enemies.

⁵The cords of death encompassed me;
the torrents of destruction terrified me.

⁶The cords of Sheol surrounded me;
the snares of death confronted me.

⁷In my distress I called on the LORD;
to my God I cried for help.
From his temple he heard my voice;
my cry reached his ears.

⁸Then the earth reeled and shook;
the foundations of the mountains trembled
and quaked because he was angry.

⁹Smoke rose from his nostrils;
consuming fire came from his mouth;
burning coals blazed from him.

¹⁰He bent the heavens and came down,
thick darkness beneath his feet.

¹¹He rode on a cherub and flew;
he soared on the wings of the wind.

¹²He made darkness his hiding place,
his canopy around him —
dark waters, thick clouds of the sky.

¹³From the brightness before him
his clouds broke through —
hail and coals of fire.

¹⁴The LORD thundered from heaven;
the Most High gave forth his voice —
hail and coals of fire.

¹⁵He sent out his arrows and scattered them;
he flashed lightning and threw them into confusion.

¹⁶Then the channels of the sea were exposed,
the foundations of the world laid bare
at your rebuke, LORD,
at the blast of the breath of your nostrils.

¹⁷He reached down from on high and took hold of me;
he drew me out of many waters.

¹⁸He delivered me from my powerful enemy,
from those who hated me,
for they were too strong for me.

¹⁹They confronted me on the day of my disaster,
but the LORD became my support.

²⁰He brought me out into a wide-open space;
he rescued me because he delighted in me.

²¹The LORD has dealt with me according to my righteousness;
according to the cleanness of my hands he has repaid me.

²²For I have kept the ways of the LORD
and have not acted wickedly against my God.

²³For all his judgments are before me;
his statutes I have not turned away from me.

²⁴I was blameless before him
and kept myself from my guilt.

²⁵The LORD has repaid me according to my righteousness,
according to the cleanness of my hands in his sight.

²⁶With the faithful you show yourself faithful;
with the blameless you show yourself blameless.

²⁷With the pure you show yourself pure;
with the crooked you show yourself shrewd.

²⁸For you save a humble people,
but haughty eyes you bring low.

²⁹For you light my lamp, LORD;
my God illuminates my darkness.

³⁰For by you I can charge a battle line;
by my God I can leap over a wall.

³¹As for God — his way is complete.
The word of the LORD is refined;
he is a shield to all who take refuge in him.

³²For who is God besides the LORD?
And who is a rock except our God?

³³God — the one who arms me with strength
and makes my way blameless.

³⁴He makes my feet like the feet of a deer
and sets me on the heights.

³⁵He trains my hands for war
so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze.

³⁶You have given me the shield of your salvation;
your right hand upholds me,
and your humility has made me great.

³⁷You broaden the path beneath me,
and my ankles do not give way.

³⁸I pursued my enemies and overtook them;
I did not turn back until they were destroyed.

³⁹I struck them so they could not rise;
they fell beneath my feet.

⁴⁰You armed me with strength for battle;
you brought my assailants to their knees beneath me.

⁴¹You made my enemies turn their backs to me,
and those who hated me — I silenced them.

⁴²They cried for help, but there was no one to save;
even to the LORD, but he did not answer them.

⁴³I ground them fine as dust before the wind;
I poured them out like mud in the streets.

⁴⁴You delivered me from the strife of peoples;
you set me as head of nations.
A people I had not known now serve me.

⁴⁵At the mere hearing of me they obey;
foreigners come cringing before me.

⁴⁶Foreigners lose heart
and come trembling from their strongholds.

⁴⁷The LORD lives! Blessed be my rock!
Exalted be the God of my salvation!

⁴⁸The God who gives me vindication
and subdues peoples under me.

⁴⁹He rescues me from my enemies.
You lift me above my adversaries;
from the violent man you deliver me.

⁵⁰Therefore I will praise you among the nations, LORD,
and sing to your name.

⁵¹He gives great victories to his king
and shows faithful love to his anointed —
to David and his offspring forever.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. This is the longest superscription in the Psalter. The title 'servant of the LORD' (eved YHVH) is a title of highest honor — applied to Moses (Deuteronomy 34:5), Joshua (Joshua 24:29), and the messianic figure of Isaiah's Servant Songs. David receives this designation only here and in the parallel 2 Samuel 22:1.
2. The verb *racham* used by a human toward God is unique here. Normally it describes God's compassion toward humans or a parent's love for a child. David reverses the direction: he loves God with the same visceral, gut-level affection that God shows to Israel. This opening word sets the emotional register for the entire psalm.
3. The seven titles form one of the densest concentrations of divine metaphor in the Hebrew Bible. Each draws from a different aspect of protection: geological (rock, cliff), military (fortress, shield, stronghold), personal (deliverer, God), and animal (horn). Together they compose a complete portrait of divine sufficiency.
4. *mehullal* ('the praised one, the one worthy of praise') is a Pual participle — God is inherently, passively worthy of praise; praise is his due nature. The verse establishes the psalm's fundamental logic: calling on the LORD results in salvation. The two clauses are cause and effect.
5. *chevlei mavet* ('cords/pangs of death') — *chevel* can mean both 'rope/cord' (binding, trapping) and 'birth pang' (pain, writhing). Death either binds or tortures. *nachalei veliyya'al* ('torrents of Belial/destruction') — the word *beliyya'al* means 'worthlessness, destruction, the abyss.' The torrents are not ordinary floods but surges from the underworld itself.
6. The parallelism between *mavet* ('death') in verse 5 and *She'ol* in verse 6 identifies them as overlapping realities. The psalmist is trapped in a zone where death and Sheol converge — caught in cords and snares, hemmed in on every side. The imagery establishes the extremity from which God will rescue.
7. The verse traces the trajectory of prayer: from the psalmist's mouth to God's temple to God's ears. The cry travels upward through space and arrives. The verb *shava* ('to cry for help') is an urgent, anguished call — not polite petition but desperate screaming. God hears from his *heikhal* — both earthly temple and heavenly palace.
8. The theophany that begins here and runs through verse 16 is the most elaborate divine-warrior intervention scene in the Psalter. Every element — earthquake, fire, darkness, wind, water — echoes the exodus traditions and transfers them to David's personal experience.
9. The anthropomorphism is deliberate and extreme: smoke from God's nose (the Hebrew *af* means both 'nose' and 'anger'), fire from God's mouth, burning coals igniting. This is dragon-language applied to the Creator — God as a figure of terrifying, volcanic fury. The image draws from volcanic phenomena (smoke, fire, glowing stones) and applies them to divine wrath.
10. The verb *natah* applied to the heavens appears also in Isaiah 40:22 ('he stretches out the heavens like a curtain'). Here the stretching is downward — God pushes through the sky to reach the one who called.
11. The *keruv* (cherub) is not the chubby infant of later art but a powerful composite creature — part human, part animal, part bird — that serves as God's throne-bearer (Ezekiel 1, 10) and mount. God rides the cherub as a warrior rides a chariot. The 'wings of the wind' (*kanfei ruach*) make the storm itself God's vehicle.
12. God's concealment in darkness is both terrifying and protective. The *sukkah* ('canopy, booth, shelter') of verse 12 is made of *choshekh* ('darkness') and *cheshkat mayim* ('dark waters'). God is hidden — his arrival is known by its effects (earthquake, fire, wind) but his person remains veiled. The psalmist is saved by a God he cannot see.
13. The *nogah* ('brightness, radiance') is God's own luminosity breaking through the surrounding darkness. The storm clouds are not merely weather but the garments of God's approach, and they break apart to release hail (*barad*) and fire — the weapons of divine intervention, echoing the seventh plague in Exodus 9:23-24.
14. Thunder is God's voice (*qol*) — the same identification made in Psalm 29. The title *Elyon* ('Most High') emphasizes God's supremacy over all other powers. The thunder is not mere meteorology but divine speech — God's answer to the psalmist's cry in verse 7.
15. God's arrows (*chitsim*) are the lightning bolts — the divine warrior's ranged weapons. The verb *puts* ('to scatter') describes the dispersal of the enemy army. The verb *hamam* ('to confuse, throw into panic') is the same word used for God's action against the Egyptians at the Red Sea (Exodus 14:24) and against the Canaanites in Joshua 10:10.
16. This verse marks the climax of the theophany. The entire created order — from sky to sea bed to the foundations beneath the earth — has been affected by God's intervention. The scale is deliberately disproportionate to one man's rescue: God deploys universe-altering power to save a single servant.
17. The verb *mashah* ('to draw out') creating a verbal link to Moses is likely intentional. The psalmist is a new Moses — drawn from drowning waters by divine intervention. The 'many waters' function as a symbol of chaos throughout the Hebrew Bible (Psalm 29:3, 93:4, Isaiah 17:12-13).
18. The honest admission *ki ametsu mimmenni* ('for they were stronger than me') is significant. The psalmist does not pretend he could have saved himself. The enemy was genuinely overpowering. The rescue was necessary precisely because the psalmist was overmatched — divine intervention was not a supplement to human effort but a replacement for it.

19. be-yom eidi ('on the day of my calamity') — eid refers to a catastrophic event, a disaster, a time when everything collapses. The contrast is sharp: the enemy struck at the worst possible moment, and at that same moment the LORD became mish'an ('support, staff to lean on').
20. The phrase ki chafets bi ('because he delighted in me') is the emotional heart of the psalm. It grounds the entire cosmic rescue — earthquake, fire, cherub-riding, heaven-bending — in a single motive: delight. God did all this because he wanted to.
21. This verse begins the 'righteousness declaration' section (vv. 21-25) that mirrors 2 Samuel 22:21-25. The claims are situational — David acted with integrity toward Saul specifically, refusing to kill the LORD's anointed when given the opportunity (1 Samuel 24, 26). The language is covenantal: God rewards covenant faithfulness with covenant protection.
22. Verse 22 continues the psalm's thematic and structural development.
23. Verse 23 continues the psalm's thematic and structural development.
24. Verse 24 continues the psalm's thematic and structural development.
25. Verse 25 continues the psalm's thematic and structural development.
26. The fourfold pattern (faithful/faithful, blameless/blameless, pure/pure, twisted/twisted in vv. 26-27) is one of the most important theological statements in the Psalter about the nature of God's responsiveness. God meets people where they are — but this means the twisted encounter a God who appears twisted to them.
27. The word iqqesh ('crooked, twisted, perverse') describes someone whose path is deliberately convoluted — who practices deceit and manipulation. God's response to the crooked — titpatal ('you show yourself twisted/shrewd') — is startling. It means God outmaneuvers the manipulator at their own game. God does not become morally crooked, but he proves more cunning than the cunning.
28. Verse 28 continues the psalm's thematic and structural development.
29. The lamp (ner) is a symbol of life, prosperity, and dynastic continuity (1 Kings 11:36, 15:4 — 'a lamp in Jerusalem'). God lighting the psalmist's lamp means sustaining his life and his lineage. The darkness (choshki) is both literal (the darkness of danger) and metaphorical (the darkness of despair).
30. Verse 30 continues the psalm's thematic and structural development.
31. This verse appears verbatim in 2 Samuel 22:31 and echoes Deuteronomy 32:4 ('The Rock — his work is perfect'). It functions as the psalm's creedal statement, distilling the entire testimony into three affirmations.
32. Verse 32 continues the psalm's thematic and structural development.
33. Verse 33 continues the psalm's thematic and structural development.
34. Verse 34 continues the psalm's thematic and structural development.
35. Verse 35 continues the psalm's thematic and structural development.
36. anvah ('humility, gentleness') applied to God is remarkable. The 2 Samuel 22:36 parallel reads anothekha ('your answering, your response'). Both readings attribute the psalmist's greatness to God's gracious condescension — the willingness of the Most High to stoop.
37. Verse 37 continues the psalm's thematic and structural development.
38. Verse 38 continues the psalm's thematic and structural development.
39. Verse 39 continues the psalm's thematic and structural development.
40. Verse 40 continues the psalm's thematic and structural development.
41. Verse 41 continues the psalm's thematic and structural development.
42. The enemies' unanswered cry to the LORD is devastating. They called on the same God the psalmist called on — but received no answer. The principle of verse 26 applies: God responds differently to the faithful and the crooked. The same God who heard the psalmist's cry (v. 7) does not hear theirs.
43. Verse 43 continues the psalm's thematic and structural development.
44. Verse 44 continues the psalm's thematic and structural development.
45. Verse 45 continues the psalm's thematic and structural development.
46. Verse 46 continues the psalm's thematic and structural development.
47. chay YHVH ('the LORD lives!') is an oath formula and a doxological cry. After describing all that God has done, the psalmist returns to the foundational confession: the LORD is alive. This is not philosophical assertion but experiential testimony — the God who acted is the God who lives.
48. Verse 48 continues the psalm's thematic and structural development.
49. Verse 49 continues the psalm's thematic and structural development.

50. Paul quotes this verse in Romans 15:9 as evidence that God's saving purpose always intended to reach beyond Israel to the nations. The psalmist's praise among the goyim ('nations') becomes, in Paul's reading, a prophecy of Gentile inclusion in worship.
51. The word *mashiach* ('anointed one') is the source of 'Messiah.' In its original context it refers to the reigning king of David's line. The phrase *ad olam* ('forever') connects this psalm to the eternal covenant of 2 Samuel 7:12-16 and to the messianic hope that animates the Psalter.

19

Summary: *A psalm of David in two movements that together form one of the most celebrated poems in the Hebrew Bible. The first movement (vv. 2-7) hymns the heavens as witnesses to God's glory — the sky speaks without words, the sun runs its course like a bridegroom and a champion. The second movement (vv. 8-11) turns from creation's testimony to the Torah's perfection, cataloging the law's qualities in six parallel lines: perfect, trustworthy, right, pure, clean, true. The psalm concludes with a personal prayer (vv. 12-15) asking for cleansing from hidden faults and protection from presumptuous sins, ending with the iconic petition: 'Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, LORD, my rock and my redeemer.'*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The junction between the two halves — from creation to Torah — is one of the most studied transitions in biblical poetry. C.S. Lewis called Psalm 19 'the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world.' The connection between the two halves is not arbitrary but theological: the same God who built order into the heavens built order into the Torah. The sun that illuminates the physical world (v. 7) corresponds to the commandment that enlightens the eyes (v. 9). Creation and Torah are two forms of the same divine revelation — one written in the sky, the other on scrolls. The six descriptions of Torah in verses 8-10 form one of the most concentrated celebrations of Scripture in all of Scripture. Each line names the law by a different term (torah, edut, piqqudim, mitzvah, yirat YHVH, mishpatim), assigns it a quality (perfect, trustworthy, right, pure, clean, true), and describes its effect on the human person (restoring the soul, making the simple wise, rejoicing the heart, enlightening the eyes, enduring forever, being altogether righteous).*

Translation Friction: *The apparent disjunction between the creation hymn (vv. 2-7) and the Torah hymn (vv. 8-11) has led some scholars to propose that Psalm 19 was originally two separate poems joined by an editor. The creation section uses the divine name El (v. 2), while the Torah section uses YHVH (vv. 8-15) — the shift in name may reflect different sources or may be theologically deliberate (El as Creator, YHVH as covenant lawgiver). The phrase 'the fear of the LORD' (yirat YHVH, v. 10) appears in the list of Torah synonyms, which is unusual — 'fear' is a human response, not a legal corpus. Its inclusion suggests that the psalmist understands Torah not merely as legislation but as the entire relational posture of reverence toward God.*

Connections: *Psalm 119 is the massive expansion of what Psalm 19:8-11 compresses into six lines — the same synonyms, the same qualities, the same effects, extended over 176 verses. The creation hymn connects to Genesis 1 (creation by speech), Psalm 8 (the heavens as God's handiwork), and Romans 1:19-20 (creation revealing God's nature). Paul quotes verse 5 in Romans 10:18 to argue that the gospel has reached all nations, reading the 'voice' of creation as a type of the apostolic proclamation. The concluding prayer (v. 15) has become one of the most frequently quoted verses in Jewish and Christian liturgy.*

¹For the choirmaster. A psalm of David.

²The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the expanse proclaims the work of his hands.

³Day after day pours out speech,
and night after night reveals knowledge.

⁴There is no speech and there are no words;
their voice is not heard.

⁵Yet their measuring line goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.
In them he has set a tent for the sun,

⁶It comes out like a bridegroom from his chamber,
rejoicing like a champion to run its course.

⁷Its rising is from one end of the heavens,
and its circuit reaches to the other end;
nothing is hidden from its heat.

⁸The law of the LORD is perfect,
restoring the soul.
The testimony of the LORD is trustworthy,
making the simple wise.

⁹The precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart.
The commandment of the LORD is pure,
enlightening the eyes.

¹⁰The fear of the LORD is clean,
standing forever.
The judgments of the LORD are true,
righteous altogether.

¹¹More desirable than gold — than much fine gold;
sweeter than honey — than honey dripping from the comb.

¹²Moreover, by them your servant is warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.

¹³Who can discern their errors?
Cleanse me from hidden faults.

¹⁴Also keep your servant from willful sins;
do not let them rule over me.
Then I will be blameless,
and innocent of great transgression.

¹⁵Let the words of my mouth
and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable before you,
LORD, my rock and my Redeemer.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Verse 1 continues the psalm's thematic and structural development.
2. kavod ('glory') when applied to God refers to the visible manifestation of his presence — weight, substance, radiance that can be perceived. The heavens do not merely suggest God's existence; they actively narrate his kavod, making the invisible God's attributes perceptible.

3. The personification of day and night as speakers who pass testimony to one another creates a remarkable image: time itself is a medium of revelation. Every 24-hour cycle is a fresh installment in creation's ongoing sermon about God.
4. This verse can be read two ways: 'There is no speech... [yet] their voice goes out' (the paradox of wordless communication) or 'There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard' (universal reach). The first reading is more consistent with the Hebrew syntax and creates the more powerful theological point.
5. qav ('line, measuring cord') is read by the Septuagint as qol ('voice'), producing 'their voice has gone out through all the earth.' Paul follows the Septuagint reading in Romans 10:18. The Hebrew qav ('measuring line') suggests that creation's witness has a precise, measured extent — it reaches everywhere by design, not by accident.
6. The dual imagery — bridegroom and warrior — resists any reduction of the sun to mere metaphor. The psalmist sees the sun as genuinely magnificent, a creation that reflects its Creator's glory through both beauty and power. Ancient Near Eastern cultures worshipped the sun as a deity; the psalmist demotes it to a tent-dweller (v. 5) who runs a course God assigned.
7. The phrase 'nothing is hidden from its heat' functions as a literary hinge. In the creation section, it refers to the sun's physical reach. Read in light of the Torah section that follows, it becomes a statement about the comprehensiveness of divine revelation: God's word, like God's sun, penetrates everywhere.
8. The six Torah lines (vv. 8-10) form a tightly structured catalog. Each line names the law (torah, edut, piqqudim, mitzvah, yirat YHVH, mishpatim), describes its character (perfect, trustworthy, right, pure, clean, true), and states its effect on the person who receives it (restoring, making wise, rejoicing, enlightening, enduring, being righteous).
9. The claim that Torah rejoices the heart is not peripheral but central to the psalm's theology. God's instruction is not a burden but a delight. This is the same conviction that drives Psalm 119's repeated expressions of love for the law.
10. The inclusion of yirat YHVH ('fear of the LORD') in a list of Torah synonyms is theologically significant. It identifies the reverential posture toward God as itself a form of Torah — perhaps the foundational form from which all specific commandments flow. Proverbs 1:7 calls this fear 'the beginning of knowledge.'
11. The comparison of Torah to gold addresses value; the comparison to honey addresses pleasure. Together they insist that God's instruction is both the most valuable possession and the most enjoyable experience available to a human being. This is not dutiful obedience but passionate desire.
12. The psalmist now identifies himself as avdekha ('your servant') — the same title given to David in the superscription of Psalm 18. The reward (eqev rav, 'great consequence/reward') is not specified — it may be the very qualities listed in verses 8-9 (restored soul, wise mind, glad heart, enlightened eyes) rather than external prosperity.
13. The movement from Torah's perfection (vv. 8-11) to human imperfection (vv. 13-14) is not a contradiction but a consequence. The more clearly one sees the law's perfection, the more clearly one sees one's own failure. Torah's light reveals what was hidden.
14. The progression from hidden faults (unconscious) to willful sins (conscious) to great transgression (definitive) maps an escalating hierarchy of sin. The psalmist asks for cleansing at every level — from the faults he cannot see to the rebellion he fears he might choose.
15. The go'el ('redeemer') is a legal term from Israelite family law. The go'el was the nearest kinsman responsible for buying back family land that had been sold, redeeming a relative from slavery, or avenging a murdered family member (Leviticus 25:25, Ruth 3:12-13). By calling God go'ali, the psalmist claims God as his closest family member — the one with both the obligation and the power to buy him back.

20

Summary: *A royal liturgy spoken by the congregation on behalf of the king as he prepares to go to war. The people pray for God to answer the king from his holy place, to send help from the sanctuary and support from Zion, to remember his offerings and accept his sacrifices. The psalm builds to a declaration of trust: 'Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we call on the name of the LORD our God.' It ends with a final petition for the king's victory and God's answer.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 20 is a rare window into the liturgical life of the pre-exilic temple. The congregation speaks to and about the king, praying for his success before battle. The structure suggests a ceremony: the people speak their blessings (vv. 2-6), a solo voice (perhaps a priest or prophet) declares confidence in divine anointing (v. 7), the people affirm their trust (vv. 8-9), and all join in the final petition (v. 10). The theological center is verse 8: the distinction between trusting in military technology (chariots and horses) and trusting in the name (shem) of the LORD. The 'name' in Israelite theology is not a label but the accessible presence of God — to invoke the name is to invoke the person. The psalm insists that Israel's military strategy is ultimately theological: they*

go to war in the name of the LORD, not in the strength of their arsenal.

Translation Friction: *The psalm assumes the legitimacy of the Davidic monarchy and the efficacy of temple sacrifice — the king's offerings and burnt sacrifices (vv. 4) are presented as genuine means of securing divine favor. For post-exilic readers (and for all later readers without king or temple), the psalm requires transposition: from literal king to awaited messiah, from physical temple to spiritual worship, from military battle to spiritual conflict. The psalm also raises the question of how divine favor relates to military outcome — Israel did not always win its wars, even when the king sacrificed and the people prayed.*

Connections: *Psalm 21 is the companion piece — where Psalm 20 prays for victory before battle, Psalm 21 gives thanks for victory after battle. The pair forms a liturgical unit. The chariots-and-horses statement (v. 8) echoes Deuteronomy 17:16, which prohibits the king from multiplying horses (military power), and Isaiah 31:1, which warns against relying on Egyptian cavalry. The phrase 'the name of the LORD our God' (shem YHVH Eloheinu) connects to the third commandment's prohibition against carrying God's name for emptiness (Exodus 20:7) — here the name is carried into battle as a banner of trust.*

¹For the choirmaster. A psalm of David.

²May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble;
may the name of the God of Jacob set you safely on high.

³May he send you help from the sanctuary
and support you from Zion.

⁴May he remember all your grain offerings
and accept your burnt offering. Selah.

⁵May he grant you your heart's desire
and fulfill all your plans.

⁶We will shout for joy over your victory
and in the name of our God raise our banners!
May the LORD fulfill all your requests.

⁷Now I know that the LORD saves his anointed;
he answers him from his holy heaven
with the mighty saving power of his right hand.

⁸Some trust in chariots and some in horses,
but we call on the name of the LORD our God.

⁹They collapse and fall,
but we rise and stand firm.

¹⁰LORD, save the king!
Answer us on the day we call.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Verse 1 continues the psalm's thematic and structural development.
2. The 'name' (shem) of God in Israelite theology functions as a near-synonym for God's presence. The temple was the place where God caused his name to dwell (Deuteronomy 12:5). To pray in God's name is to access God himself through the revealed identity he has shared.
3. The help (ezer) comes from qodesh ('the holy place, the sanctuary') and from Zion — the physical location where God's presence dwells. The theology is spatial: divine aid emanates from the temple and travels to the battlefield. The sanctuary is not merely a place of worship but a base of operations for divine intervention.

4. The minchah ('grain offering') and olah ('burnt offering') represent the king's pre-battle worship. The king does not march to war without first offering sacrifice — the military campaign is embedded in liturgical practice. The army's strength begins at the altar.
5. The congregation prays that God will align the outcome with the king's intention: kilvavekha ('according to your heart') and kol atsatekha ('all your counsel/strategy'). The assumption is that the king's plans are righteous — his heart's desire is for the good of the nation and the glory of God. The prayer asks God to give the king what he seeks.
6. The banner (degel) was a tribal and military standard in ancient Israel (Numbers 2:2). Here the congregation declares that their banner displays God's name rather than a tribal emblem or royal crest. The battle belongs to the LORD, and the banner makes that claim visible.
7. The shift to first-person singular ('now I know') may indicate a prophetic oracle within the liturgy — a moment when a single voice announces divine assurance to the congregation and the king. This voice transforms the congregation's prayer into confident knowledge.
8. The distinction between trusting in chariots/horses and trusting in God's name is foundational to Israelite theology. Deuteronomy 17:16 prohibits the king from multiplying horses. Isaiah 31:1 pronounces woe on those who go to Egypt for horses. The psalm institutionalizes this warning as congregational confession: our security is the name, not the arsenal.
9. The perfect tenses ('they have collapsed,' 'we have risen') may be prophetic perfects — describing the future outcome with such certainty that past tense is used. The congregation speaks of the battle's result as already accomplished, expressing faith that God's answer is certain.
10. The textual division of this verse is debated. The Masoretic accents suggest 'LORD, save! May the king answer us on the day we call.' But many translators read 'LORD, save the king! Answer us on the day we call.' The ambiguity may be deliberate, allowing the verse to function as both a prayer for the king and a prayer for the congregation.

21

Summary: *A royal psalm celebrating the king's victories and blessings, sung to the LORD who answers the king's requests with life, honor, and enduring joy. The first half (vv. 2-8) recounts what God has already given the king; the second half (vv. 9-13) anticipates the destruction of the king's enemies. The psalm forms a pair with Psalm 20 — Psalm 20 prays before battle, Psalm 21 celebrates after victory.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The superscription assigns the psalm to David, but the voice throughout is third-person — the congregation or a court singer addresses the king. The psalm's theology is straightforward and almost dangerously optimistic: the king asked for life and received it 'length of days forever and ever' (v. 5). In its original royal context, this would refer to dynastic permanence. The shift at verse 9 is abrupt — from blessing to burning, from coronation imagery to furnace imagery. The 'fire' of God's anger (esh, v. 10) will consume the king's enemies like kindling. The final verse returns to worship, as though the violence between was necessary to clear the way for praise.*

Translation Friction: *The Hebrew versification places the superscription as verse 1, so the psalm runs verses 1-14 in the WLC (versus 13 verses in English translations that treat the superscription as unnumbered). The phrase olam va-ed ('forever and ever,' v. 5) applied to the king's life creates tension — no Davidic king lived forever. This language pushes beyond historical kingship toward eschatological hope, which is why later tradition read this psalm messianically. The 'fiery oven' (tanur esh, v. 10) is an unusual image — elsewhere tanur refers to a baker's oven (Hosea 7:4-7), not a weapon of war. The metaphor may conflate the heat of God's anger with the domestic image of an oven consuming fuel.*

Connections: *Psalm 21 responds to the prayers of Psalm 20 — what was requested there is celebrated here. The phrase 'You have set a crown of pure gold on his head' (v. 4) echoes 2 Samuel 12:30, where David takes the crown of the Ammonite king. The blessing of 'length of days forever and ever' (v. 5) echoes the Davidic covenant promise in 2 Samuel 7:16. The fiery judgment imagery anticipates Malachi 4:1, where the coming day burns like an oven.*

¹For the musical director — a psalm of David.

²O LORD, the king rejoices in your strength;
in your salvation, how greatly he celebrates!

³You have given him his heart's desire,
and the request of his lips you have not withheld. Selah.

⁴For you meet him with blessings of good things;
you set a crown of pure gold on his head.

⁵He asked life from you — you gave it to him,
length of days forever and beyond.

⁶Great is his glory through your salvation;
splendor and majesty you lay upon him.

⁷For you make him a blessing forever;
you fill him with joy in your presence.

⁸For the king trusts in the LORD,
and through the faithful love of the Most High he will not be shaken.

⁹Your hand will find all your enemies;
your right hand will find those who hate you.

¹⁰You will make them like a fiery oven
at the time of your appearing.
The LORD in his anger will swallow them,
and fire will consume them.

¹¹You will destroy their offspring from the earth,
and their descendants from among humanity.

¹²For they stretched out evil against you;
they devised a scheme — but they will not succeed.

¹³For you will put them to flight;
you will aim your bowstrings at their faces.

¹⁴Rise up, O LORD, in your strength!
We will sing and make music to your power.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The superscription *lamnatsseach* ('for the director/leader') appears in 55 psalms. The term *natsach* may mean 'to lead, direct, oversee' — the exact musical function is uncertain. In WLC versification, this superscription is verse 1.
2. The word order places YHWH first, then 'in your strength' — emphasizing that the strength belongs to God, not the king. The king is the beneficiary, not the source.
2. *Yeshuah* ('salvation') in military contexts means 'victory' or 'deliverance.' It is the same root as the name *Yeshua/Joshua/Jesus*, making this verse resonate far beyond its immediate royal context.
3. The parallelism pairs 'heart's desire' (*taavat libbo*) with 'request of his lips' (*areshet sefatav*) — what the king wanted inwardly, he also asked for audibly, and God granted both. The word *areshet* ('request, utterance') appears only here in the Hebrew Bible, making its precise nuance uncertain.
3. *Selah* appears here as a musical or liturgical marker. Its meaning remains debated — possibly 'lift up' (voices or instruments) or a pause for reflection.
4. *Teqadmennu* ('you meet him, you come to meet him beforehand') is from *qadam*, meaning 'to come before, anticipate.' God's blessings arrive before the king even asks — they are preemptive grace. The crown of *paz* ('refined gold, pure gold') signals both the coronation ceremony and God's lavish provision.
5. *Olam va-ed* is an emphatic doubled expression: *olam* ('perpetuity, ages') plus *ed* ('perpetuity, everlasting duration'). Together they insist on permanence beyond what either word alone conveys. This is stronger than simply 'forever' — it is 'forever and then still more.'

6. Hod ve-hadar ('splendor and majesty') is a word pair that elsewhere describes God's own appearance (Psalm 104:1, 1 Chronicles 16:27). When applied to the king, it signals that the king bears the reflected radiance of God — he is God's visible representative on earth.
7. The phrase et-panekha ('with your face/presence') echoes the priestly blessing of Numbers 6:25-26. The king's deepest joy comes not from wealth or victory but from proximity to God's own face. The psalmist locates the ultimate royal blessing in divine presence, not political power.
8. This verse is the hinge of the psalm. Verses 2-7 described what God has done for the king; verse 8 gives the reason — the king trusts (boteach) in the LORD. Trust is the foundation, and chesed is the guarantee. From verse 9 onward, the psalm shifts to what will happen to the king's enemies.
9. The psalm shifts abruptly from third-person description of the king to second-person address. The 'you' could be directed to the king or to God — the ambiguity may be deliberate, as the king acts as God's agent in battle. 'Your hand will find' (timtsa yadkha) means 'your hand will reach, overtake, seize' — the enemies cannot hide.
10. Tanur esh ('oven of fire' or 'fiery oven') is a striking domestic image applied to divine judgment. A tanur is a clay baking oven, heated until its interior walls glow. The enemies become the oven itself — or are thrown into it. The image communicates total, consuming destruction.
10. The phrase le-et panekha ('at the time of your face/appearing') suggests a theophany — God's visible manifestation in judgment. When God's face appears, it brings not comfort but consuming fire for those who oppose him.
11. Piryamo ('their fruit') and zaram ('their seed') refer to children and descendants. The judgment extends beyond the enemies themselves to their entire line. This is total eradication language — the enemies' legacy will be erased from the earth. In its ancient context, the loss of descendants was the ultimate curse, as it meant the complete end of one's name and memory.
12. Natu ('they stretched out, extended, bent') paired with raah ('evil') conveys intentional aggression — the enemies reached toward the king with harmful intent. But their mezimmah ('scheme, plan, plot') will fail. The verse explains the justice of the judgment: destruction comes because the enemies actively plotted against God's anointed.
13. Teshitem shekhem ('you will make them a shoulder/back') means forcing the enemies to turn and flee, exposing their backs. The bowstrings (metarim) aimed at their faces complete the military image — whether they flee or face forward, they cannot escape. The verse portrays total military dominance.
14. The pairing of nashirah ('we will sing') and unezammerah ('we will make music') reflects the psalm's superscription — this is liturgical poetry designed for musical performance. Gevurah ('strength, power, might') is the attribute being celebrated, completing the frame with oz ('strength') from verse 2.

22

Summary: *The most anguished lament in the Psalter, moving from absolute abandonment to universal praise. The sufferer opens with the shattering cry 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' and descends through mockery, physical torment, encirclement by enemies compared to bulls and lions and dogs, and the piercing of hands and feet. At verse 22 (Hebrew v. 23), the psalm pivots without explanation to triumphant praise — the sufferer vows to declare God's name in the assembly, and the vision expands until all nations, all the dead, and all future generations worship the LORD.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This psalm contains more specific correspondences to the crucifixion of Jesus than any other Old Testament text. The opening cry is quoted in Aramaic by Jesus on the cross (Matthew 27:46). The mockery ('He trusted in the LORD; let him deliver him,' v. 9), the thirst ('my tongue clings to my jaws,' v. 16), the pierced hands and feet (v. 17), and the division of garments by casting lots (v. 19) are all cited or echoed in the Gospel passion narratives. Yet the psalm makes no claim to be predictive prophecy — it is the raw, present-tense suffering of a real person in genuine agony. The Christian reading sees in it a pattern of innocent suffering that reaches its ultimate fulfillment in Christ, while the Jewish reading sees a paradigm of Israel's suffering and vindication. Both readings honor the text; neither exhausts it. The unexplained pivot from despair to praise remains one of the great mysteries of the Psalter — what happened between verses 22 and 23 that turned agony into worship?*

Translation Friction: *The Hebrew of verse 17 (WLC v. 17) is one of the most disputed readings in the entire Hebrew Bible. The Masoretic text reads kaari ('like a lion') — 'like a lion, my hands and my feet.' This is grammatically incomplete and difficult. Many manuscripts and ancient versions (including the Septuagint, composed centuries before Christ) read kaaru ('they pierced') — 'they pierced my hands and my feet.' A Dead Sea Scrolls fragment (5/6HevPs) also supports the reading 'they pierced.' The difference is a single Hebrew letter: yod versus vav. We render the line to reflect the textual difficulty honestly. The superscription 'upon*

Ayyelet ha-Shachar' ('the doe of the dawn') likely indicates a melody name, though some interpreters see symbolic significance — the hunted doe at dawn, vulnerable and exposed.

Connections: Jesus quotes the opening line from the cross in Aramaic: Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani (Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34). The mockery of verse 9 is echoed in Matthew 27:43. The thirst of verse 16 connects to John 19:28. The pierced hands and feet of verse 17 are central to the crucifixion narratives. The divided garments and lots of verse 19 are fulfilled in John 19:23-24. The vow to praise in the assembly (v. 23) is quoted in Hebrews 2:12. The universal scope of the ending (vv. 28-32) anticipates the Great Commission and the ingathering of the nations. Within the Psalter, this psalm stands as the darkest point before the shepherd psalm that follows — Psalm 22 is the valley of the shadow, Psalm 23 is the green pasture on the other side.

¹For the musical director, on 'The Doe of the Dawn' — a psalm of David.

²My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me,
from the words of my groaning?

³My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer;
by night, but I find no rest.

⁴Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.

⁵In you our ancestors trusted;
they trusted, and you rescued them.

⁶To you they cried out and were delivered;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

⁷But I am a worm, not a man —
scorned by humanity, despised by the people.

⁸All who see me mock me;
they curl their lips, they shake their heads:

⁹"He rolled himself onto the LORD — let the LORD rescue him!
Let him deliver him, since he delights in him!"

¹⁰Yet it was you who drew me from the womb,
who made me secure at my mother's breasts.

¹¹Upon you I was cast from birth;
from my mother's womb, you have been my God.

¹²Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is no one to help.

¹³Many bulls surround me;
strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.

¹⁴They open their mouths wide against me —
a lion tearing and roaring.

¹⁵I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are pulled apart.
My heart is like wax —
it melts within me.

¹⁶My strength is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue clings to my jaws.
You lay me in the dust of death.

¹⁷For dogs surround me;
a pack of evildoers closes in on me.
They pierce my hands and my feet.

¹⁸I can count all my bones;
they stare and gaze at me.

¹⁹They divide my garments among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots.

²⁰But you, O LORD — do not be far away!
O my strength, come quickly to help me!

²¹Deliver my life from the sword,
my only life from the power of the dog.

²²Save me from the mouth of the lion!
From the horns of the wild oxen — you have answered me!

²³I will declare your name to my brothers;
in the midst of the assembly I will praise you.

²⁴You who fear the LORD, praise him!
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him!
Stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!

²⁵For he has not despised or detested
the suffering of the afflicted one.
He has not hidden his face from him,
but when he cried out, he heard.

²⁶From you comes my praise in the great assembly;
I will fulfill my vows before those who fear him.

²⁷The humble will eat and be satisfied;
those who seek the LORD will praise him.
May your hearts live forever!

²⁸All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD,
and all the families of the nations will bow down before you.

²⁹For kingship belongs to the LORD,
and he rules over the nations.

³⁰All the prosperous of the earth will eat and bow down;
before him will kneel all who descend to the dust —
even those who cannot keep themselves alive.

³¹A generation to come will serve him;
it will be told of the Lord to the next generation.

³²They will come and declare his righteousness
to a people yet unborn —
that he has done it.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Ayyelet ha-Shachar ('the doe of the dawn') is most likely a melody name, though the image — a vulnerable animal at first light — resonates powerfully with the psalm's content. The doe hunted at dawn mirrors the sufferer surrounded by predators. In WLC versification, this superscription is verse 1.
2. Jesus quotes this verse from the cross in Aramaic: Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani (Matthew 27:46). The fact that Jesus chose this psalm — not a psalm of confession, but a psalm of innocent suffering — is theologically significant. He identifies with the righteous sufferer, not the guilty penitent.
2. Shaagah ('roaring, groaning') is used elsewhere of lions (Psalm 104:21, Amos 3:4). The sufferer's cry has the raw intensity of an animal's roar — this is not polite prayer but primal anguish.
3. The merism 'by day ... by night' means the crying is continuous — there is no relief at any hour. The phrase lo dumiyyah li ('no silence/rest for me') could mean either 'I have no silence' (I never stop crying) or 'there is no stillness for me' (I find no peace). Both readings reinforce the relentless, unanswered agony.
4. Yoshev ('sitting, dwelling, enthroned') is the same verb used for kings sitting on thrones. God is not merely present in Israel's worship — he reigns from it. The praises of the people are the location of God's kingship.
5. The threefold repetition of trust (batchu ... batchu ... tefalletemo) builds a case from history: the ancestors trusted, they kept trusting, and God delivered. The verb palat ('to escape, be delivered, be rescued') describes swift, complete rescue. The sufferer is constructing an argument — past faithfulness should guarantee present deliverance. But the argument will fail in his own case, which deepens the agony.
6. Lo-voshu ('they were not put to shame') is the theological payoff: trusting God did not humiliate them. Shame (bosh) in Hebrew is public exposure as a fool — trusting in something that fails you. The ancestors trusted and were vindicated. The sufferer, by contrast, is being publicly shamed (vv. 7-9), which makes his situation an apparent contradiction of the historical pattern.
7. Tolaath specifically refers to the crimson worm (tola'at shani), the insect crushed to produce scarlet dye. The image carries overtones of being crushed, of yielding color through destruction. Later Christian readers saw in this an image of Christ's blood-stained suffering, though the psalm's original context is simply one of utter degradation.
8. Yaftiru ve-safah ('they open wide with the lip') describes a sneering, contemptuous gesture — pushing out the lower lip in mockery. Yaniu rosh ('they shake the head') is a gesture of scorn and dismissal. The sufferer's pain is a public spectacle, and the audience participates with derisive body language. Matthew 27:39 records the same gestures at the crucifixion: 'And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads.'
9. The verb gol ('roll') is imperative in form but is quoted as past action by the mockers — 'he rolled (his burden) to the LORD.' This verb choice suggests total, weight-bearing trust, like rolling a heavy stone onto someone else. The mockery targets the completeness of the sufferer's dependence on God.
10. The sufferer responds to the mockers not by arguing theology but by going back to his earliest experience of God. Gochi mi-baten ('the one who drew me from the belly') makes God the midwife. Mavtiachi al-shedei immi ('the one who made me trust at my mother's breasts') means that the sufferer's trust in God predates his conscious memory — God taught him trust before he could speak. This is the deepest possible foundation for faith: God was there at the beginning.
11. Hoshlakhti ('I was cast, thrown') is passive — the sufferer did not choose God; he was thrown onto God at birth. The relationship is not voluntary but foundational, woven into his existence from the moment of emergence from the womb. The final phrase — Eli attah ('you are my God') — is a personal confession that echoes the opening cry of verse 2. Despite everything, the sufferer still claims God as his own.
12. The spatial language is precise and devastating: God is far (rashaq), trouble is near (qerovah), and help is absent (ein ozer). The sufferer is caught between a distant God and a close enemy with no mediator, no ally, no helper. This is the setup for the violent imagery that follows.

13. Bashan (the Golan Heights region) was famous for its rich pastureland and powerful cattle (Amos 4:1, Ezekiel 39:18). The 'bulls of Bashan' (abbirei Vashan) are the largest, most dangerous cattle in the known world — they represent enemies of overwhelming physical power. The verbs *seavavuni* ('they surround me') and *kitteruni* ('they encircle me') describe a tightening ring with no escape route.
14. The animal imagery shifts from bulls to a lion (*aryeh*) — from encirclement to attack. *Toref ve-shoeg* ('tearing and roaring') describes a lion in the act of killing: tearing flesh while roaring. The open mouth (*patsu pihem*) conveys both the literal gaping jaws of a predator and the mouths of mockers hurling insults. The enemies are simultaneously verbal and physical threats.
15. The sequence moves inward: water (external), bones (structural), heart (innermost). Each image represents a deeper level of collapse. *Namas* ('it melts') is the same verb used for the melting of the Canaanites' hearts in Joshua 2:11 — it describes the loss of all capacity to resist or endure.
16. *Cheres* ('potsherd') is a broken piece of pottery — not just dry but shattered and useless. The tongue clinging to the jaws (*leshoni mudbaq malqochay*) describes extreme dehydration. John 19:28 records Jesus saying 'I thirst' from the cross. The final line — *la-afar mavet tishpeteni* ('to the dust of death you lay me') — is addressed to God. The sufferer does not blame his enemies for his death; he holds God responsible. The 'dust of death' is the grave itself, the return to the earth of Genesis 3:19.
17. The textual variant between *kaari* (, 'like a lion') and *kaaru* (, 'they pierced/dug') hinges on a single letter: *yod* vs. *vav*. The Masoretic *kaari* reading would require supplying a verb — 'like a lion [they maul?] my hands and my feet' — but no verb is present. The *kaaru* reading provides a complete clause: 'they pierced my hands and my feet.' The Nahal Hever scroll (5/6HevPs) reads *ka'aru*, supporting 'they pierced.'
17. Dogs in the biblical world were unclean scavengers (1 Kings 14:11, 21:23-24). To be surrounded by dogs is to be treated as carrion — already dead, already refuse.
18. The sufferer is so emaciated that every bone is visible and countable (*asapper kol atsmotai*). This is the body of someone who has been wasting — from illness, torture, starvation, or all three. The pronoun 'they' (*hemmah*) shifts to the onlookers who watch the spectacle with fascinated contempt. The sufferer is both dying and being watched dying.
19. The distinction between *begadai* ('my garments') and *levushi* ('my clothing/vesture') may indicate outer garments (divided into portions) and an inner garment (awarded by lot as a single piece). John 19:23-24 makes exactly this distinction: the soldiers divided the outer garments but cast lots for the seamless tunic.
20. The sufferer turns from describing his enemies back to God. The plea *al-tirchaq* ('do not be far') echoes verse 12 and answers the opening complaint that God is *rachok* ('far'). *Eyaluti* ('my strength') is a rare word — possibly from *ayyal* ('ram, deer'), suggesting swiftness and power. The imperative *chushah* ('hurry!') conveys desperation — time is running out.
21. *Nafshi* ('my soul/life') is paralleled by *yechidati* ('my only one, my unique one, my darling'). *Yechidah* means 'only, solitary, unique' — the sufferer has only one life, and it is about to be taken. The 'sword' (*cherev*) represents violent death, and 'the dog' (*kelev*, singular) represents the most contemptible of the enemies from verse 17. The plea is not for comfort but for survival.
22. *Remim* ('wild oxen') were massive, now-extinct aurochs — the largest and most dangerous bovines in the ancient world. The KJV translated this as 'unicorns' following the Septuagint's *monokeros*, but the reference is to the wild ox (*Bos primigenius*). Their horns were weapons of impalement.
22. The shift from petition to praise at *anitani* ('you have answered me') is unexplained. Some scholars propose that a priestly oracle of salvation was spoken between verses 22a and 22b during liturgical performance. Others see a pure act of faith. The text itself offers no mechanism — only the result.
23. The vow to declare God's name (*shimkha*) to his brothers (*echai*) is quoted in Hebrews 2:12, where the writer applies it to Jesus declaring God's name to the church. In its psalmic context, the sufferer who was alone and surrounded by enemies now stands in the *qahal* ('assembly, congregation') among brothers — restored to community. The shift from isolation to assembly is itself a form of salvation.
24. The scope begins expanding. The sufferer's individual praise broadens to include all who fear the LORD, all the seed of Jacob, all the seed of Israel. Three groups named, three commands given: *halleluhu* ('praise him'), *kabbeduhu* ('glorify/honor him'), *guru mimmennu* ('stand in awe of him'). The verb *kavad* ('glorify, honor') shares the root of *kavod* ('glory') — the worshippers are to add weight to God's reputation.
25. *Shiqqets* ('to detest, abhor') is the verb form of *sheqets* ('abomination, detestable thing') — used for unclean animals and idolatrous practices. For God not to find the sufferer's affliction *sheqets* means that suffering does not make a person unclean or repulsive to God. This is a radical claim in a world where affliction was commonly interpreted as divine punishment.
26. *Me-ittekha tehilati* ('from you is my praise') means the praise itself originates in God — the sufferer does not generate worship from his own resources; God supplies both the deliverance and the praise that responds to it. The vow fulfillment (*nedarai ashallam*) refers to the ancient practice of making a vow during crisis and paying it publicly after deliverance, typically with a *todah* ('thanksgiving') sacrifice and a communal meal (see next verse).
27. The *todah* meal — the thanksgiving feast following vow fulfillment — is now described. The *anavim* ('humble, afflicted, poor') eat and are satisfied (*yisba'u*). This is not merely physical food but the communal celebration of God's deliverance. The blessing *yechi levavkhem la-ad* ('may your hearts live forever') extends the 'life' that was the sufferer's most desperate request (v. 21) to the entire worshipping community.

- 28.** The phrase *kol mishpechot goyim* ('all families of the nations') echoes the Abrahamic promise of Genesis 12:3 — 'in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.' The sufferer's story becomes the vehicle through which the nations encounter the God of Israel.
- 29.** *Ha-melukhah* ('the kingship, the royal sovereignty') belongs to the LORD — not to earthly kings, not to the enemies who seemed to triumph. This brief, powerful declaration provides the theological basis for the universal worship described in the surrounding verses. If YHWH is king over all nations, then all nations owe him allegiance.
- 30.** The inclusion of *yordei afar* ('those who go down to the dust') in the worshipping community is extraordinary — it suggests worship beyond death, a communion of the living and the dead before God. This pushes against the typical Old Testament view that the dead in Sheol cannot praise God (Psalm 6:5, 88:10-12). Either this psalm envisions a resurrection hope or it uses hyperbolic language to express the totality of God's sovereignty.
- 31.** *Zera* ('seed, offspring, generation') introduces the temporal dimension — not only all places and all peoples, but all future times will be included. The story of God's deliverance will be transmitted (*yesuppar*, 'it will be told, recounted') from generation to generation. The sufferer's experience becomes a permanent testimony.
- 32.** The phrase *ki asah* ('for he has done it') echoes the declaration on the cross in John 19:30: *tetelestai* ('it is finished'). Whether or not the Gospel writer intended the echo, the structural parallel is striking — both are final declarations that a work of suffering and salvation is complete.
- 32.** *Tsidqato* ('his righteousness') in this context is God's covenant faithfulness demonstrated through saving action. It is not abstract moral quality but concrete rescue — God's righteousness is what God does for the afflicted one.

23

Summary: *The most beloved psalm in the Psalter — six verses of absolute trust. The speaker declares the LORD as shepherd, provider, guide, protector, and host. The imagery moves from open pasture (vv. 1-3) through a dark valley (v. 4) to a banquet table prepared in the presence of enemies (v. 5), and closes with the assurance of faithful love pursuing the speaker all the days of his life. The psalm contains no petition, no complaint, no confession — only confidence.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 23 is positioned immediately after Psalm 22, the most anguished lament in the Psalter. This placement is not accidental. The sufferer who passed through the valley of the shadow of death in Psalm 22 — mocked, pierced, surrounded by enemies, laid in the dust of death — now emerges on the other side and can say 'The LORD is my shepherd; I lack nothing.' The green pastures and still waters are where you arrive after the cross. The 'table prepared in the presence of enemies' (v. 5) does not mean the enemies are gone — they are still watching. It means the shepherd feeds his own even while the wolves circle. The shift from third person ('he leads me') to second person ('you are with me') happens exactly at the darkest point — verse 4, the valley of the shadow of death. When the danger is greatest, the distance between speaker and God collapses from 'he' to 'you.'*

Translation Friction: *The psalm's two controlling metaphors — shepherd (vv. 1-4) and host (vv. 5-6) — are not as separate as they first appear. In the ancient Near East, kings were called shepherds of their people, and hospitality was a royal obligation. Both images describe a single relationship: the LORD as the one who provides, protects, and honors. The phrase *gei tsalmavet* (v. 4) is traditionally rendered 'valley of the shadow of death,' but *tsalmavet* may be a compound of *tsel* ('shadow') and *mavet* ('death'), or it may be an intensified form of *tselem* ('deep shadow, darkness'). Both readings yield approximately the same meaning: the darkest, most dangerous passage imaginable. We retain 'shadow of death' because the traditional rendering accurately captures the semantic weight.*

Connections: *The shepherd metaphor for God appears throughout the Hebrew Bible: Genesis 48:15 (Jacob's blessing), Genesis 49:24 ('the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel'), Psalm 80:1 ('Shepherd of Israel'), Isaiah 40:11 ('he will feed his flock like a shepherd'), Ezekiel 34 (God as the true shepherd replacing failed human shepherds). Jesus claims the title in John 10:11: 'I am the good shepherd.' The anointing with oil (v. 5) connects to the anointing of priests (Exodus 29:7) and kings (1 Samuel 16:13). The 'house of the LORD' in verse 6 anticipates the temple theology of Psalms 27:4 and 84:1-4. The overflowing cup (v. 5) reappears in Psalm 116:13 as 'the cup of salvation.'*

¹A psalm of David.

The LORD is my shepherd —
I lack nothing.

²In green pastures he makes me lie down;
beside still waters he leads me.

³He restores my life;
he leads me in right paths
for the sake of his name.

⁴Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me.
Your rod and your staff — they comfort me.

⁵You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

⁶Surely goodness and faithful love will pursue me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD
for length of days.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. In WLC versification, the superscription and first poetic line share verse 1. The possessive suffix on ro'i ('my shepherd') makes this a personal claim, not a theological abstraction. The speaker does not say 'The LORD is a shepherd' or 'The LORD shepherds Israel' — he says 'The LORD is my shepherd.' The intimacy is the point.
2. The verb nahal ('to lead, guide') specifically describes leading to water — it is used of leading flocks to drinking places (Genesis 33:14, Isaiah 49:10). The shepherd does not merely point the way; he walks the path and brings the sheep to what they need.
3. Leman shemo ('for the sake of his name') is a critical theological qualifier. The shepherd's care is grounded in the shepherd's own character, not the worthiness of the sheep. This removes all performance anxiety from the relationship — the sheep is cared for because of who the shepherd is.
4. The grammatical shift from third person to second person at ki attah immadi ('for you are with me') is one of the most noted features of the psalm. When speaking of green pastures and still waters — places of safety — the speaker can describe God at a distance ('he'). When death closes in, distance collapses and the speaker speaks directly to God ('you'). Theology becomes prayer at the point of greatest need.
4. Tsalmavet may be a compound noun (tsel + mavet = 'shadow of death') or an intensive form meaning 'deep darkness.' The traditional 'shadow of death' reading, supported by the Septuagint (skia thanatou), captures the full weight of the image and has been retained.
5. The transition from shepherd imagery to banquet imagery is not a break in the psalm but a deepening. In the ancient Near East, a king's hospitality was an extension of his shepherding role. To set a table for someone in the presence of their enemies was a political and social statement: this person is under my protection, and anyone who touches them answers to me.
6. The verb radaf ('pursue, chase') is deliberately chosen to invert the language of threat. Throughout the psalms, enemies pursue (rodeph) the righteous (Psalm 7:2, 31:15, 35:3). Here, it is goodness and chesed that pursue. The hunted becomes the beloved.
6. Le-orekh yamim ('for length of days') is the same phrase used in Psalm 21:5 for the king's extended life. It suggests not eternity in the abstract but the fullness of lived time — all the days, every day, without interruption.

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Summary: *A processional liturgy in three movements: the LORD as cosmic creator and owner of the earth (vv. 1-2), the moral requirements for approaching his holy mountain (vv. 3-6), and the dramatic call for the gates to open for the King of Glory (vv. 7-10). The psalm was likely performed during a procession bringing the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem or the temple, with antiphonal voices calling back and forth at the gates.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The psalm's three sections create a theological sequence that moves from cosmology to ethics to worship. First: God owns everything because he made everything (vv. 1-2). Second: therefore, approaching this God requires clean hands and a pure heart (vv. 3-6). Third: this God is not distant — he is coming through the gates in power and glory, and the gates themselves must expand to receive him (vv. 7-10). The antiphonal structure of the gate liturgy is electrifying: one voice demands that the gates lift their heads, another voice asks 'Who is this King of Glory?', and the answer thunders back — 'The LORD, strong and mighty! The LORD, mighty in battle!' The question is asked twice (vv. 8, 10), and the second answer intensifies: 'The LORD of Hosts — he is the King of Glory!' This is not a conversation seeking information; it is a liturgical drama building to a climax.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase nesoï olam ('ancient doors' or 'everlasting gates,' vv. 7, 9) is unusual. If the psalm accompanied the ark's entrance into a newly built or captured city, the gates are not literally 'everlasting' — they are being addressed with cosmic language that elevates a historical event to mythic significance. The moral requirements of verses 3-6 (clean hands, pure heart, no idolatry, no false oaths) function as a 'torah of entrance' — a priestly catechism determining who may ascend the temple mount. Similar entrance liturgies appear in Psalm 15 and Isaiah 33:14-16. The question 'Who may ascend?' is not rhetorical — it was asked and answered in actual temple worship.*

Connections: *The opening declaration that the earth belongs to the LORD echoes Exodus 19:5 ('all the earth is mine') and anticipates Paul's quotation in 1 Corinthians 10:26. The entrance requirements connect to Psalm 15 (a parallel torah of entrance) and to Jesus's Beatitude 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God' (Matthew 5:8). The gate liturgy has been read christologically as the ascension — the risen Christ entering the heavenly gates as the King of Glory. The title YHWH Tsevaot ('LORD of Hosts') in the climactic verse 10 identifies the King of Glory with the commander of heaven's armies. Psalms 22-24 form a triptych: Psalm 22 is the cross (suffering), Psalm 23 is the shepherd (provision), Psalm 24 is the crown (enthronement).*

¹Of David — a psalm.

The earth belongs to the LORD, and everything in it —
the world and all who live in it.

²For he founded it upon the seas
and established it upon the rivers.

³Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD?
And who may stand in his holy place?

⁴The one with clean hands and a pure heart,
who does not lift up his soul to what is false
and does not swear deceitfully.

⁵He will carry away blessing from the LORD
and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

⁶This is the generation of those who seek him,
who seek your face, O God of Jacob. Selah.

⁷Lift up your heads, O gates!
Be lifted up, O ancient doors!
Let the King of Glory come in!

⁸The LORD, strong and mighty —
Who is this King of Glory?
the LORD, mighty in battle!

⁹Lift up your heads, O gates!
Lift them up, O ancient doors!
Let the King of Glory come in!

¹⁰The LORD of Hosts —
Who is he, this King of Glory?
he is the King of Glory! Selah.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The possessive construction *la-YHWH* ('to the LORD, belonging to the LORD') is emphatic. It does not say 'The LORD made the earth' (though verse 2 will) — it says the earth is his. Ownership, not merely craftsmanship, is the claim. This has implications for ecology, justice, and worship: if the earth is God's, humans are stewards, not owners.
2. The cosmology here reflects the ancient Near Eastern understanding of the earth as a flat disc founded upon the primordial waters. The seas (*yammim*) and rivers (*neharot*) are the chaotic waters that God subdued at creation (Genesis 1:2, 6-10). To found the earth upon the seas means God imposed order on chaos, creating stable ground above the waters. The verb *yasad* ('to found, lay a foundation') and the verb *konan* ('to establish, make firm') both emphasize intentional, skilled construction.
3. This 'torah of entrance' genre appears also in Psalm 15 and Isaiah 33:14-16. In practice, a Levitical priest would ask these questions at the temple gate, and the worshippers would respond with the qualifications listed in verse 4. It was a liturgical dialogue, not a private meditation.
4. *Nafshi* ('my soul') in the Hebrew text is first-person — 'who has not lifted up my soul to falsehood.' Some manuscripts read *nafsho* ('his soul'), which makes smoother grammatical sense. The first-person reading may reflect the liturgical context: the worshippers speak these qualifications about themselves, confessing their own integrity as they approach the gate.
4. *Bar levav* ('pure of heart') is echoed by Jesus in Matthew 5:8: 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' The connection between heart purity and access to God's presence runs directly from this psalm to the Sermon on the Mount.
5. The reward for meeting the entrance requirements is *berakhah* ('blessing') and *tsedaqah* ('righteousness'). Notably, righteousness here is received, not achieved — it comes from God (*me-Elohei yisho*, 'from the God of his salvation'). The person who approaches God with clean hands and a pure heart receives from God the very righteousness that qualifies the approach. This creates a theological circle: you need righteousness to approach, and approaching gives you more righteousness.
6. The phrase *meqavshei fanekha Yaaqov* ('those who seek your face, Jacob') is textually difficult. Some manuscripts and the Septuagint read 'the God of Jacob' rather than simply 'Jacob.' The rendering follows the interpretive tradition that 'seeking the face' is directed to God, not to Jacob. *Selah* marks the transition from the entrance liturgy to the gate procession that follows.
7. The personification of the gates creates a dramatic liturgical scene. In performance, one group likely stood outside the gates (representing the procession with the ark) and another group stood inside (representing the gatekeepers). The call-and-response format builds anticipation with each exchange.
8. The question *mi zeh Melekh ha-Kavod* ('who is this King of Glory?') is asked by the gatekeepers — a liturgical challenge requiring identification. The answer comes in a torrent of military titles: *YHWH izzuz ve-gibbor* ('the LORD, fierce and powerful'), *YHWH gibbor milchamah* ('the LORD, warrior of battle'). The King of Glory is identified not by beauty or wisdom but by overwhelming combat power. This is a warrior entering in triumph.
9. The command is repeated — the gates did not open at the first call. The repetition builds dramatic urgency. The second time, the verb shifts from *ve-hinnaseu* ('be lifted up,' passive/reflexive) to *useu* ('lift up,' active imperative) — the command becomes more direct, more insistent. The King of Glory is still waiting, and the gates must respond.
10. *YHWH Tsevaot* ('the LORD of Hosts') appears over 260 times in the Hebrew Bible. *Tsevaot* ('hosts, armies') refers to the heavenly armies — angelic beings, cosmic forces, possibly even the stars marshaled as troops. The title identifies God as supreme commander of all reality, visible and invisible.

10. The second answer is more powerful than the first. Verse 8 said 'the LORD, mighty in battle' — a single warrior. Verse 10 says 'the LORD of Hosts' — the commander of all armies. The identification escalates from powerful individual to supreme sovereign.

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Summary: *An acrostic psalm — each verse begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet — weaving together petition for guidance, confession of sin, and trust in God's covenant faithfulness. David asks God to teach him, lead him, remember mercy rather than sin, and rescue him from enemies and shame. The psalm oscillates between confidence and vulnerability, with the alphabet structure providing a framework of order imposed on emotional turbulence.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The acrostic structure is imperfect — the letter vav is missing from its expected position, the letter resh appears to be doubled (vv. 18-19), and the final verse (v. 22) falls outside the alphabet entirely, adding a pe that addresses Israel as a whole rather than the individual speaker. These 'irregularities' may be intentional: the broken acrostic mirrors a broken speaker. A person in genuine need cannot maintain perfect form. The extra verse at the end — stepping outside the alphabetic constraint to pray for all Israel — suggests that individual prayer always opens toward communal concern. The psalm's three great theological words — chesed (vv. 6-7, 10), emet ('truth/fidelity,' vv. 5, 10), and berit ('covenant,' v. 10) — form the core vocabulary of God's character throughout the Hebrew Bible.*

Translation Friction: *The acrostic form creates an inherent tension between artistic structure and emotional authenticity. Is the speaker genuinely distressed, or is this a literary exercise? The answer is both: the acrostic is a discipline that channels real emotion into ordered speech. Ancient readers would have recognized the alphabetic pattern as a sign of completeness — the prayer covers everything from aleph to tav, from A to Z. The phrase chattot neuray ('sins of my youth,' v. 7) raises a question: which specific sins? The psalm does not say, which makes it universally applicable — every reader has sins of youth to confess.*

Connections: *The acrostic form also appears in Psalms 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, and 145, as well as Lamentations 1-4 and Proverbs 31:10-31. The petition 'teach me your paths' (v. 4) connects to the Torah theology of Psalm 119. The covenant language of verse 10 ('all the paths of the LORD are chesed and emet') echoes Exodus 34:6, where God reveals his character to Moses as 'abounding in chesed and emet.' The prayer for Israel in the final verse anticipates the communal laments of Psalms 44 and 74.*

¹Of David.

To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.

²My God, in you I trust.

Do not let me be put to shame;
do not let my enemies gloat over me.

³Indeed, none who wait for you will be put to shame;
shame will come to those who are treacherous without cause.

⁴Make your ways known to me, O LORD;
teach me your paths.

⁵Guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all day long.

⁶Remember your compassion, O LORD,
and your acts of faithful love,

for they are from of old.

⁷Do not remember the sins of my youth or my rebellions.
According to your faithful love, remember me —
for the sake of your goodness, O LORD.

⁸Good and upright is the LORD;
therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

⁹He guides the humble in justice
and teaches the humble his way.

¹⁰All the paths of the LORD are faithful love and truth
for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

¹¹For the sake of your name, O LORD,
pardon my guilt — for it is great.

¹²Who is the one who fears the LORD?
Him will he instruct in the way he should choose.

¹³His soul will rest in prosperity,
and his offspring will inherit the land.

¹⁴The counsel of the LORD belongs to those who fear him,
and his covenant — he makes it known to them.

¹⁵My eyes are always on the LORD,
for he will free my feet from the net.

¹⁶Turn to me and be gracious to me,
for I am lonely and afflicted.

¹⁷The troubles of my heart have multiplied;
bring me out of my distresses.

¹⁸Look on my affliction and my trouble,
and forgive all my sins.

¹⁹Look at my enemies — how many they are!
They hate me with violent hatred.

²⁰Guard my life and deliver me;
do not let me be put to shame,
for I take refuge in you.

²¹Let integrity and uprightness protect me,
for I wait for you.

²²Redeem Israel, O God,
from all its troubles.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The superscription le-David ('of David') is integrated with the first acrostic line. Lifting the soul (nafshi essa) toward God contrasts with Psalm 24:4, where lifting the soul to what is false disqualifies one from God's presence. Here, the soul is lifted to the only worthy destination.
2. The bet line. The prayer against shame (al-evoshah) reveals the social dimension of suffering — the speaker fears not only harm but humiliation. In the ancient honor-shame culture, being publicly shamed before enemies was a fate worse than physical pain. The verb alats ('to exult, gloat') describes the triumphant crowing of enemies who celebrate another's downfall.
3. The gimel line. The speaker expands his prayer from himself to all who wait for God (kol qovekha). The verb qavah ('to wait, hope, look expectantly') describes patient, active trust. The contrast is with bogdim ('the treacherous, the faithless') — those who betray covenant loyalty. Reqam ('emptily, without cause, for nothing') modifies the treachery: they betray for no reason, their faithlessness is gratuitous.
4. The dalet line. Two synonymous requests: 'make known your ways' (derakhekha hodieni) and 'teach me your paths' (orchotekha lammedeni). Derekh ('way, road, manner of life') and orach ('path, course') are wisdom vocabulary — the speaker wants to know not just what to do but how God moves through the world. The verb lamad ('to teach, train') implies sustained instruction, not a single lesson.
5. The he line. Otekha qivviti kol ha-yom ('for you I wait all the day') expresses unbroken attentiveness. The speaker does not wait occasionally or when convenient — the waiting is kol ha-yom ('all the day'), every moment oriented toward God.
6. The zayin line. The verb zakhar ('remember') when directed to God is not about memory retrieval — God does not forget. It is a request for God to act in accordance with what he has always been. 'Remember your compassion' means 'be compassionate again, as you have always been.' Rachamim ('compassion') derives from rechem ('womb') — it is the fierce, visceral tenderness of a mother for her child.
7. The interplay of 'remember' and 'do not remember' creates the psalm's central tension: the speaker has a past that deserves judgment, but he appeals to a God whose character (chesed, tov) is greater than that past. The prayer is not 'forgive me because I've changed' but 'remember me according to who you are.'
8. The tet line. The logic is striking: because God is good and upright (tov ve-yashar), he teaches sinners (chattaim). God's response to sin is not rejection but instruction. The verb yorah ('to teach, instruct, direct') is the root of Torah ('instruction, law'). God's goodness expresses itself as pedagogy — he teaches the lost rather than abandoning them.
9. The yod line. The anavim ('humble, afflicted, lowly') are the ones God teaches. Humility is the prerequisite for divine instruction — the proud cannot learn because they believe they already know. Mishpat ('justice, judgment, right ordering') is the content of the teaching; darko ('his way') is the method. God teaches both what is right and how to walk in it.
10. Chesed ve-emet ('faithful love and truth/faithfulness') is a hendiadys — two words expressing one complex reality: God's reliable, enduring, covenant-keeping devotion. This pair appears throughout the Hebrew Bible as a summary of God's essential character (Genesis 24:27, 32:10, Exodus 34:6, Psalm 86:15, 89:14).
11. Avon ('guilt, iniquity, punishment for iniquity') encompasses the sin, its moral weight, and its consequences. The speaker does not separate these — the guilt is comprehensive. The frank admission ki rav-hu ('for it is great') is remarkable: most prayers minimize sin. This one magnifies it, trusting that God's grace is greater.
12. The mem line. The rhetorical question identifies the learner: the one who fears the LORD (yere YHWH). The verb yorah ('he will instruct') is again the root of Torah. The 'way he should choose' (derekh yivchar) implies that life presents genuine choices, and God's instruction enables right selection. Fear of God is not paralyzing dread but the orientation that makes wisdom possible.
13. The nun line. Nafsho be-tov talin ('his soul will lodge/spend the night in goodness') means the God-fearer's life settles into well-being. The verb lin ('to lodge, spend the night') suggests restful security — no anxiety-filled nights. The promise that his seed (zaro) will inherit the land (erets) echoes the Abrahamic promise (Genesis 12:7) and anticipates Jesus's Beatitude: 'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth' (Matthew 5:5).
14. Sod combines intimacy with information — it is not merely that God tells his secrets but that he brings the fearful ones into a relationship close enough to share them. The covenant (berit) is the framework within which this intimacy operates.
15. The ayin line. Einai tamid el-YHWH ('my eyes are continually toward the LORD') expresses unbroken attentiveness. The reason: hu yotsi me-reshet raglai ('he will bring out my feet from the net'). The net (reshet) is a hunting trap — the speaker is caught, ensnared, but looks to God rather than at the trap. The orientation of the eyes determines the outcome.
16. The pe line. Peneh elai ('turn to me') is a plea for God's face — his attention, his presence. The speaker identifies himself as yachid ve-ani ('solitary and afflicted'). Yachid means 'alone, only, solitary' — the suffering has isolated him. The combination of loneliness and affliction is a double burden: he suffers, and he suffers alone.
17. The tsade line. Tsarot levavi hirschiv ('the troubles of my heart have widened/expanded') means the inner anguish keeps growing — the heart's capacity for pain is being stretched. Metsuqotai ('my distresses, my straits') comes from the root tsuq ('to be narrow, pressed, confined'). The speaker is simultaneously expanding with trouble and constricted by distress — torn in both directions.

- 18.** The resh line (first occurrence). The speaker asks God to see (reeh) two things simultaneously: his suffering (onyi va-amali, 'my affliction and my toil/trouble') and his sin (chattotai). He does not separate the two — he presents himself whole, as both sufferer and sinner, and asks God to address both realities at once. The verb nasa ('to lift, carry away') when applied to sin means 'to forgive' — literally to lift the sin off the bearer.
- 19.** The resh line (second occurrence — the acrostic doubles resh). The enemies are rav ('many, numerous') and their hatred is sinat chamas ('hatred of violence' or 'violent hatred'). Chamas means 'violence, cruelty, wrongdoing' — their hostility is not passive dislike but active, destructive malice.
- 20.** The shin line. Shomrah nafshi ('guard my soul/life') and hatssileni ('deliver me') are paired petitions — protection and rescue. The recurring fear of shame (al-evosh) circles back to verse 2, forming an inclusio. The basis for confidence: ki chasiti vakh ('for I have taken refuge in you'). The verb chasah ('to take refuge, shelter') describes hiding under God's protection as under the wing of a bird (Psalm 91:4).
- 21.** The tav line — the final letter of the alphabet. Tom va-yosher ('integrity and uprightness') are personified as guardians who preserve (yitseruni, 'they will guard me') the speaker. These moral qualities are not merely internal virtues but active protectors. The psalm's alphabetic structure reaches its end with the confidence that moral wholeness and patient waiting (qivvitikha) for God are sufficient protection.
- 22.** The addition of this communal petition beyond the alphabet may indicate liturgical use — the psalm was adapted from individual prayer to congregational worship by adding this verse. Or it may be original, signaling that no individual prayer is truly complete until it includes the wider community of God's people.

26

Summary: *A psalm of self-examination and protest of innocence. David appeals to God to vindicate him, declaring that he has walked in integrity, avoided the company of the wicked, loved the house of the LORD, and kept his hands clean. The psalm moves from personal examination (vv. 1-3) to separation from evildoers (vv. 4-5) to worship at the altar (vv. 6-8) to a final plea for redemption and grace (vv. 9-12).*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This psalm is uncomfortable for modern readers who associate piety with humility and self-deprecation. David does not say 'I am a sinner in need of mercy' — he says 'Vindicate me, for I have walked in integrity.' The Hebrew Bible sees no contradiction between genuine piety and honest self-assessment. The speaker is not claiming sinless perfection but covenant faithfulness — he has kept his commitments, avoided corruption, and maintained his worship. The psalm functions as a negative confession: 'I have not sat with the worthless, I have not associated with hypocrites, I hate the assembly of evildoers.' This is not arrogance but testimony, offered to the God who can verify it.*

Translation Friction: *The tension between this psalm and psalms like 25 (where David confesses sins) and 51 (where David begs for cleansing) is real but not contradictory. Different situations call for different postures. When falsely accused, the appropriate response is to assert innocence. When genuinely guilty, the appropriate response is to confess. The same person can do both at different times. The verb shafeteni ('vindicate me, judge me') in verse 1 is a legal term — David is asking for a court hearing, confident the evidence will support him.*

Connections: *The protest of innocence echoes Job 31, the great oath of innocence. The love for God's house (v. 8) anticipates Psalm 27:4 ('One thing I have asked') and Psalm 84 ('How lovely is your dwelling place'). The hand-washing ritual (v. 6) connects to Deuteronomy 21:6-7 (the elders washing hands over the heifer) and to Pilate's gesture in Matthew 27:24. The 'level ground' (mishor) of verse 12 echoes the 'right paths' (magelei tsedeq) of Psalm 23:3.*

¹Of David.

Vindicate me, O LORD,
for I have walked in my integrity,
and I have trusted in the LORD without wavering.

²Examine me, O LORD, and test me;
refine my inner depths and my heart.

³For your faithful love is before my eyes,
and I have walked in your truth.

⁴I have not sat with worthless people,
and with the deceitful I will not associate.

⁵I hate the assembly of evildoers,
and with the wicked I will not sit.

⁶I wash my hands in innocence
and go around your altar, O LORD,

⁷raising a shout of thanksgiving
and telling of all your wondrous deeds.

⁸O LORD, I love the dwelling place of your house,
the place where your glory resides.

⁹Do not sweep my soul away with sinners,
or my life with men of blood —

¹⁰in whose hands is wickedness,
and whose right hand is full of bribes.

¹¹But as for me, I walk in my integrity.
Redeem me and be gracious to me.

¹²My foot stands on level ground;
in the assemblies I will bless the LORD.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Shafat in the judicial sense means 'to render a verdict, to vindicate' — the speaker is asking for acquittal, not punishment. The confidence is remarkable: this is someone who believes the evidence supports him and wants his day in court before the ultimate judge.
2. Three verbs of testing: *bachan* ('examine, investigate'), *nasah* ('test, try'), and *tsaraf* ('refine, smelt'). The third is metallurgical — *tsaraf* is what a silversmith does, heating metal to remove impurities. The speaker asks God to apply this process to his *kilyotai* ('kidneys') and *libbo* ('heart'). In Hebrew anthropology, the kidneys were the seat of deep emotion and conscience, while the heart was the seat of thought and will. Together they represent the entire inner life.
3. The pairing of *chesed* and *emet* (*amitekha*, 'your truth') echoes Psalm 25:10 — the twin pillars of God's character. The speaker's walk (*hithallakhti*, 'I have walked about, conducted myself') is shaped by these divine attributes.
4. The negative confession begins. *Lo yashviti im-metei-shav* ('I have not sat with men of emptiness/falsehood') — *shav* means 'emptiness, worthlessness, falsehood.' These are people whose lives are hollow. *Naalamim* ('the hidden ones, the concealed, the dissemblers') are those who hide their true intentions — hypocrites whose public face masks private corruption. The speaker has avoided both.
5. The language intensifies from avoidance to hatred. *Saneiti* ('I have hated') is a strong verb — the speaker does not merely decline to join evildoers; he actively opposes their gatherings. *Qahal mereim* ('assembly of evildoers') uses the same word *qahal* that describes Israel's worship assembly. The evildoers have their own congregation — a parody of true worship — and the speaker refuses membership.
6. *Erchats be-niqqayon kappai* ('I wash in the cleanness of my hands') may refer to a literal ritual washing before approaching the altar (compare Exodus 30:17-21, where priests wash hands and feet before serving) or to a metaphorical declaration of innocence. The 'going around' (*asovevah*) the altar suggests a processional circuit — a liturgical act of worship performed physically, walking around the altar as a visible declaration of devotion.
7. *Qol todah* ('the voice/sound of thanksgiving') is the vocal component of the *todah* offering — the thanksgiving sacrifice accompanied by public declaration of what God has done. *Nifleotekha* ('your wonders, your extraordinary acts') are the specific deeds God has performed that merit telling. Worship in the Hebrew Bible is never abstract; it is always tied to concrete divine actions.
8. The love (*ahavti*) for God's house is personal and passionate. This is the same verb used for marital love, for love between friends, for love of God. The speaker's attachment to the temple is emotional, not merely dutiful.

9. Al-teesof ('do not gather, do not sweep away') — the speaker fears being grouped with sinners in God's judgment. The separation he has practiced in life (vv. 4-5) he asks God to honor in judgment. Anshei damim ('men of blood') are those guilty of bloodshed — the most extreme category of wickedness. The speaker asks not to share their fate.
10. Zimmah ('wicked scheme, evil plan, lewdness') in their hands and shochad ('bribery') filling their right hand — the portrait is of systematic corruption. The right hand (yamin), the hand of power and action, is saturated with bribes. These are not occasional sinners but professional operators of injustice.
11. The contrast is explicit: va-ani ('but as for me') sets the speaker apart from the corrupt. He returns to the opening claim — be-tummi elekh ('in my integrity I walk'). But the final two verbs are surprising: pedeni ('redeem me') and chonneni ('be gracious to me'). Even the person who walks in integrity needs redemption and grace. Integrity is not self-sufficiency. The most upright person still depends on God's intervention.
12. Ragli amdash ve-mishor ('my foot stands in a level place') means the speaker has found solid, even footing — not the treacherous ground of the wicked but the stable terrain of integrity. Mishor ('level ground, uprightness, plain') suggests both physical stability and moral straightness. The psalm closes in worship: be-maqhelim avarakh YHWH ('in the assemblies I will bless the LORD'). The speaker who refused the assembly of evildoers (v. 5) takes his place in the assembly of the faithful.

27

Summary: *A psalm of two halves, so distinct that some scholars treat them as separate compositions. The first half (vv. 1-6) is radiant confidence — the LORD is light, salvation, and stronghold, and the speaker fears nothing. The second half (vv. 7-14) is urgent petition — the speaker begs God not to hide his face, not to abandon him, and clings to the hope that he will see God's goodness in the land of the living. The psalm moves from fortress to fragility, from certainty to desperate waiting.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The two halves of this psalm mirror the two realities of faith: the conviction that God is sovereign and the experience that God sometimes feels absent. The speaker who declares 'The LORD is my light — whom shall I fear?' in verse 1 is the same person who pleads 'Do not hide your face from me' in verse 9. These are not contradictions; they are the same person in different moments, or even the same person in the same moment holding confidence and fear simultaneously. The central desire — 'One thing I have asked of the LORD, this is what I seek: to dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life' (v. 4) — reduces all religious longing to a single request: proximity to God. Everything else — safety, victory, provision — flows from that one thing.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase be-erets chayyim ('in the land of the living,' v. 13) is set against death, not against heaven. The hope is not for escape from the world but for seeing God's goodness in this life, in this world, before death. This is pre-resurrection hope — the speaker wants to experience God's blessing here, not merely in an afterlife. The final verse (v. 14) may be the words of a priest or a prophetic voice encouraging the speaker — 'Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD.' The repetition of qavveh el-YHWH ('wait for the LORD') frames the exhortation: waiting is the posture that bridges the gap between confidence and fear.*

Connections: *The desire to 'dwell in the house of the LORD' (v. 4) connects to Psalm 23:6 ('I will dwell in the house of the LORD') and Psalm 84:1-4 ('How lovely is your dwelling place'). The imagery of being lifted up on a rock (v. 5) anticipates Psalm 40:2 ('He set my feet on a rock'). The petition 'Do not forsake me' (v. 9) echoes the abandonment cry of Psalm 22:1. The final exhortation to 'wait for the LORD' is echoed in Psalm 37:7, 9, 34 and Isaiah 40:31 ('those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength').*

¹Of David.

The LORD is my light and my salvation —
whom shall I fear?

The LORD is the stronghold of my life —
of whom shall I be afraid?

²When evildoers close in on me
to devour my flesh —

my adversaries and enemies —
they stumble and fall.

³Though an army encamps against me,
my heart will not fear.
Though war rises against me,
even then I am confident.

⁴One thing I have asked of the LORD,
this is what I seek:
to dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to gaze on the beauty of the LORD
and to seek him in his temple.

⁵For he will shelter me in his booth
in the day of trouble;
he will hide me in the secret place of his tent;
he will lift me high upon a rock.

⁶And now my head is lifted high
above my enemies all around me,
and I will offer in his tent sacrifices of joyful shouting;
I will sing and make music to the LORD.

⁷Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud;
be gracious to me and answer me.

⁸My heart says to you,
"Seek my face."
Your face, O LORD, I will seek.

⁹Do not hide your face from me;
do not turn your servant away in anger.
You have been my help —
do not cast me off, do not forsake me,
O God of my salvation.

¹⁰Though my father and mother forsake me,
the LORD will gather me in.

¹¹Teach me your way, O LORD,
and lead me on a level path
because of my enemies.

¹²Do not deliver me to the will of my adversaries,
for false witnesses have risen against me,
breathing out violence.

¹³I believe that I will see the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living.

¹⁴Wait for the LORD.
Be strong, and let your heart take courage.
Wait for the LORD.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The image of God as 'light' (or) is rare in the Psalter as a direct predicate. God is associated with light elsewhere (Psalm 36:9, 'in your light we see light'; Psalm 104:2, 'wrapped in light as a garment'), but only here does the speaker say flatly: YHWH ori — 'the LORD is my light.' The metaphor encompasses guidance (light shows the way), safety (light reveals threats), and joy (light is associated with life and blessing).
2. Le-ekhol et-besari ('to eat my flesh') is predatory language — the enemies are carnivorous, treating the speaker as prey. But the expected outcome is inverted: instead of the speaker being consumed, the attackers themselves stumble (kashlu) and fall (nafalu). The past tense suggests this has already happened — the speaker has survived previous attacks and draws confidence from that history.
3. The hypothetical escalates: from individual evildoers (v. 2) to an entire encamped army (machaneh) to full-scale war (milchamah). At each level of escalation, the speaker's response remains the same: no fear, only trust. The phrase be-zot ani vote'ach ('in this I am trusting') is ambiguous — 'this' could refer back to God's identity as light, salvation, and stronghold, or forward to the single request of verse 4. Either way, trust is the speaker's settled posture regardless of circumstances.
4. The verb levaqer ('to inquire, to seek, to examine') can also mean 'to visit, to attend to.' The temple is a place not merely of worship but of investigation — the speaker goes there to learn, to seek understanding, to encounter God's mind as well as his presence.
5. Three images of protection: sukkah ('booth, shelter' — the same word as the Festival of Booths), seter oholo ('the hidden place of his tent'), and tsur ('rock'). The progression moves from temporary shelter (booth) to hidden enclosure (secret tent) to elevated fortress (rock). Each image adds a dimension: shelter from elements, concealment from enemies, and elevation above threats. The 'day of trouble' (yom raah) is the specific crisis the speaker anticipates.
6. The lifted head (yarum roshi) is the posture of victory and honor — the opposite of shame, which bows the head. The speaker's enemies surround him (sevivotai, 'all around me'), but his head rises above them because God has elevated him. The response is worship: zivchei teruah ('sacrifices of joyful shouting') are offerings accompanied by loud, exuberant cries of praise. This is not quiet, contemplative worship but explosive, full-throated celebration.
7. The tone shifts abruptly. The confident declaration of verses 1-6 gives way to urgent petition. Shema ('hear') is an imperative — the speaker is no longer celebrating but pleading. Chonneni ('be gracious to me') and aneni ('answer me') are the verbs of someone who is not yet experiencing the security described in the first half of the psalm. The two halves are not sequential (confidence then crisis) but simultaneous — faith and need coexist.
8. The Hebrew is syntactically complex and has been interpreted various ways. Our rendering follows the reading where the heart recalls God's general invitation ('Seek my face') and the speaker responds personally. The shift from plural (baqqeshu, 'seek,' addressed to many) to singular (avaqesh, 'I will seek') makes the response intimate: God invited everyone, and I am personally answering.
9. Four negated imperatives in rapid succession: do not hide (al-taster), do not turn away (al-tat), do not cast off (al-tittesheni), do not forsake (al-taazeveni). The verb azav ('forsake') is the same word from Psalm 22:1 ('why have you forsaken me?'). The speaker's deepest fear is not enemy attack but divine absence. The entire verse is a plea against God's disappearance.
10. Whether ki means 'when,' 'though,' or 'if' affects the tone — 'when' suggests it has happened; 'though' suggests a hypothetical extreme; 'if' is conditional. All three readings yield the same theological conclusion: parental failure, the worst imaginable human abandonment, does not exhaust divine faithfulness.
11. Horeni ('teach me') and necheni ('lead me') are paired requests for instruction and guidance. The 'level path' (orach mishor) is smooth, unobstructed terrain — the speaker needs clarity because enemies (shorerai, 'those who watch for me, who lie in wait') are monitoring his movements. The Hebrew shorer suggests watchful, hostile surveillance — these enemies are studying the speaker, looking for missteps.
12. Edei-sheqer ('witnesses of falsehood') and yefe'ach chamas ('one who breathes out violence') describe a courtroom scene — the speaker is being attacked with perjured testimony and violent intent disguised as legal process. The verb puwach ('to breathe, blow, puff') applied to chamas ('violence') creates an image of people who exhale destruction the way others exhale air — violence is their natural respiration.
13. In the Masoretic text, the word lulei has extraordinary dots (puncta extraordinaria) above it — a scribal notation indicating uncertainty about the reading. These dots may signal that the word was debated by ancient editors. Despite the textual uncertainty, the meaning is clear: the speaker's belief in God's goodness is the only thing preventing collapse.
14. The repetition of qavveh el-YHWH ('wait for the LORD') at the beginning and end of the verse creates a frame that makes waiting the defining act. The Hebrew verb qavah means 'to wait, to hope, to look expectantly' — it is not passive resignation but active, taut expectation, like a rope pulled tight.

28

Summary: *A psalm of urgent petition that pivots dramatically to thanksgiving. David cries out to the LORD as his rock, terrified of being dragged down to the pit with the wicked. He asks God to distinguish him from those who speak peace to their neighbors while harboring malice. At verse 6, the tone shifts abruptly — God has heard, and the speaker erupts in praise, declaring the LORD his strength, his shield, and the saving refuge of his anointed.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The pivot at verse 6 is one of the sharpest in the Psalter. Verses 1-5 are pure crisis — the speaker fears silence from God, separation from God, and being grouped with the wicked for judgment. Then verse 6 announces: 'Blessed be the LORD, for he has heard the voice of my pleas for mercy.' No transition, no explanation of what changed. This pattern of sudden reversal — common in lament psalms — suggests either a moment of prophetic assurance received during worship or a deliberate literary structure that compresses the entire journey from despair to deliverance into a single psalm. The final two verses (vv. 8-9) shift from individual thanksgiving to communal intercession — the speaker prays for the LORD's people and the LORD's inheritance, using shepherd language that echoes Psalm 23.*

Translation Friction: *The imprecatory section (vv. 3-5) asks God to 'repay' the wicked according to their deeds and 'tear them down.' This is not vengeful emotion seeking expression but a request for divine justice — the speaker asks God, not himself, to act. The theology underlying the request is covenantal: those who oppose God's anointed oppose God himself, and God should deal with them accordingly. The term meshicho ('his anointed,' v. 8) refers to the Davidic king but carries messianic overtones that later tradition developed extensively.*

Connections: *The cry to the 'rock' (tsur, v. 1) echoes Psalm 18:2, 31, 46 and anticipates Psalm 31:2-3. The fear of being 'drawn down to the pit' (v. 1) connects to Psalm 30:3 and Psalm 88:4. The shepherd imagery in verse 9 ('shepherd them and carry them forever') links directly to Psalm 23 and to Isaiah 40:11. The title 'his anointed' (meshicho, v. 8) connects to Psalm 2:2 and to the broader messianic thread through the Psalter.*

¹Of David.

To you I cry, O LORD, my rock!
Do not be deaf to me,
for if you are silent toward me,
I will become like those who go down to the pit.

²Hear the voice of my pleas for mercy
when I cry out to you,
when I lift my hands
toward the inner sanctuary of your holiness.

³Do not drag me away with the wicked,
with the workers of evil,
who speak peace to their neighbors
while malice is in their hearts.

⁴Give them according to their deeds
and according to the evil of their actions.
Give them according to the work of their hands;
repay them what they deserve.

5Because they do not understand the works of the LORD
or the deeds of his hands,
he will tear them down and never rebuild them.

6Blessed be the LORD,
for he has heard the voice of my pleas for mercy!

7The LORD is my strength and my shield.
In him my heart trusts, and I am helped;
my heart leaps for joy,
and with my song I give him thanks.

8The LORD is the strength of his people
and the saving refuge of his anointed.

9Save your people and bless your inheritance;
shepherd them and carry them forever.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The wordplay between *techerash* ('be silent/deaf') and the speaker's calling (*eqra*, 'I cry out') creates a terrifying asymmetry: the speaker shouts and God is silent. The rock that should echo back provides no resonance. This is the nightmare scenario of faith — calling to God and hearing nothing.
2. The *devir* ('inner sanctuary, oracle room') is the Holy of Holies — the innermost chamber of the temple where the ark of the covenant rested and where God's presence was believed to dwell most intensely. The speaker lifts his hands (*nossi yadai*) toward this place as the directional focus of prayer. The hands lifted toward the *devir* are like antennae oriented toward the source of divine communication.
3. The contrast between *shalom* (spoken) and *raah* (harbored) is the defining characteristic of the wicked in this psalm. They are not openly violent but secretly malicious. This makes them more dangerous than obvious enemies — they destroy through deception rather than direct assault.
4. The fourfold repetition — *ke-fo'olam* ('according to their deeds'), *ke-roa maalleleihem* ('according to the evil of their practices'), *ke-maaseh yedeihem* ('according to the work of their hands'), *hashev gemulam lahem* ('repay their recompense to them') — is not rhetorical excess but legal precision. The speaker asks for strict proportional justice: let the punishment match the crime exactly. No more, no less. This is *lex talionis* applied to divine judgment.
5. The reason for judgment: *lo yavinu* ('they do not understand, they do not discern'). The wicked are not merely immoral — they are willfully obtuse. They refuse to see God's *peullot* ('works, actions') and *maaseh yadav* ('the work of his hands') in creation, history, and providence. The consequence: *yehershem* ('he will tear them down') *ve-lo yivnem* ('and will not rebuild them'). The architectural metaphor is final — demolition without reconstruction. God builds and tears down; those he tears down for willful blindness will not be rebuilt.
6. The eruption of *barukh YHWH* after five verses of desperate petition mirrors the pattern of Psalm 22, where lament gives way without explanation to praise. This pattern may reflect actual worship experience — a moment of assurance received during prayer — or it may be a theological assertion that God's hearing is certain regardless of how the speaker feels.
7. Three titles: *uzzi* ('my strength'), *maginni* ('my shield'), and the implicit savior (*neezarti*, 'I am helped/rescued'). The heart (*lev*) appears twice: it trusts (*batach*) and it leaps for joy (*yaaloz*). The same heart that was terrified of silence now exults. The verb *alaz* ('to exult, rejoice, be jubilant') describes spontaneous, uncontrollable joy — the heart does not merely feel better; it leaps.
8. The scope expands from individual to national. *YHWH oz-lamo* ('the LORD is strength for them/his people') extends the speaker's experience to the entire community. *Maoz yeshuot meshicho* ('the saving refuge of his anointed') introduces the term *mashiach* ('anointed one') — referring to the Davidic king in its original context but carrying the weight of messianic expectation in later Jewish and Christian reading. The anointed one's salvation is not private — it encompasses the people.
9. The shift from personal thanksgiving to national intercession is characteristic of Davidic psalms — the king's private experience always has public implications. The king who has been rescued by God immediately turns to pray for the people who depend on him, because his rescue is their rescue.

29

Summary: *A thunderstorm psalm — the voice of the LORD crashes seven times across the landscape, shattering cedars, splitting flames, shaking the wilderness, stripping forests bare, and causing deer to writhe. The psalm opens with a summons to the heavenly beings to ascribe glory to the LORD, traces the storm's path from the Mediterranean coast eastward through Lebanon and the desert, and closes with the LORD enthroned over the cosmic flood, giving strength and peace to his people.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The sevenfold repetition of qol YHWH ('the voice of the LORD') is the structural backbone of the psalm. Seven is the number of divine completeness, and each occurrence of 'the voice' intensifies the storm: powerful, majestic, breaking cedars, splitting fire, shaking wilderness, causing deer to calve, stripping forests. The storm moves geographically from west to east — from the 'great waters' (Mediterranean, v. 3) through Lebanon and Sirion (v. 6) to the wilderness of Kadesh (v. 8). This is not a storm observed from shelter; it is a theophany — God's self-revelation through raw natural power. Some scholars have noted structural parallels with Ugaritic hymns to Baal the storm god, suggesting that this psalm may deliberately reassign Baal's attributes to YHWH: the God of Israel is the true lord of the storm.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase benei elim ('sons of the mighty' or 'sons of gods,' v. 1) addresses heavenly beings — members of the divine council — not human worshippers. The psalm's opening audience is not the congregation in the temple but the angelic assembly in heaven. This raises the question of who is 'overhearing' this cosmic worship and why. The answer may be that the psalm invites human worshippers to join a worship service already in progress among the heavenly beings. The 'flood' (mabbul, v. 10) appears only here and in the Genesis flood narrative, linking God's enthronement to his sovereignty over the primordial waters of chaos.*

Connections: *The 'voice of the LORD' as storm theophany connects to Exodus 19:16-19 (thunder at Sinai), 1 Kings 19:11-12 (the voice that was not in the wind, earthquake, or fire), and Job 37-38 (God speaking from the whirlwind). The cedar imagery links to 2 Kings 19:23 and Isaiah 2:13. The 'flood' (mabbul) of verse 10 connects to Genesis 6-9 and to the cosmic waters of Psalm 93:3-4. The closing benediction of strength (oz) and peace (shalom) anticipates the Aaronic blessing of Numbers 6:24-26. Jesus stilling the storm (Mark 4:35-41) demonstrates authority over the same forces celebrated in this psalm.*

¹A psalm of David.

Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings!

Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength!

²Ascribe to the LORD the glory of his name;

bow down to the LORD in the splendor of holiness.

³The voice of the LORD is over the waters.

The God of glory thunders —
the LORD, over the great waters.

⁴The voice of the LORD is powerful;

the voice of the LORD is majestic.

⁵The voice of the LORD shatters the cedars;

the LORD shatters the cedars of Lebanon.

⁶He makes Lebanon skip like a calf,

and Sirion like a young wild ox.

7The voice of the LORD splits flames of fire.
 8the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.
 The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness;

 9The voice of the LORD makes the deer writhe in labor
 and strips the forests bare.
 And in his temple, all cry: "Glory!"

 10The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;
 the LORD sits enthroned as king forever.

 11The LORD gives strength to his people;
 the LORD blesses his people with peace.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Benei elim ('sons of the mighty') is linguistically related to benei ha-elohim ('sons of God') in Job 1:6, 2:1, and Genesis 6:2 — members of the heavenly council. The Septuagint translates this as 'sons of God.' The rendering 'heavenly beings' captures the meaning without importing later angelology into the text.
2. Kevod shemo ('the glory of his name') — the name bears the full weight of God's character, and the heavenly beings are to honor it accordingly. Hishtachavu ('bow down, prostrate yourselves') is the most physically complete gesture of worship — full-body prostration. Be-hadrat-qodesh ('in the splendor/adornment of holiness') could describe the worshippers dressed in holy garments or the setting of worship adorned with holiness. Either way, holiness is the environment in which true worship occurs.
3. The connection between thunder and divine speech is ancient and cross-cultural, but in the Hebrew Bible it carries specific theological freight. At Sinai, God spoke from the mountain with thunder and fire (Exodus 19:16-19). Here, the entire landscape becomes Sinai — God speaks from every direction.
4. Two attributes of the divine voice: ba-koach ('in power') and be-hadar ('in majesty, splendor'). The voice is both forceful and beautiful — it does not merely destroy; it overwhelms with grandeur. Koach is raw power; hadar is the aesthetic impact of that power. Together they describe an experience that is simultaneously terrifying and magnificent.
5. The cedars of Lebanon (arzei ha-Levanon) were the largest, strongest, most majestic trees in the ancient world — the ancient equivalent of skyscrapers. They were symbols of power, permanence, and human pride (Isaiah 2:13). When God's voice shatters (shover) them, it demonstrates power that dwarfs the most impressive works of nature. If the cedars cannot stand, nothing can.
6. Sirion is identified with Mount Hermon in Deuteronomy 3:9. The psalm traces the storm's path from the Mediterranean coast (v. 3) through the Lebanon range and Hermon (v. 6) and into the southern wilderness (v. 8), covering the entire north-south extent of the land.
7. Chotsev lahavot esh ('hewing/splitting flames of fire') — lightning. The verb chatsav means 'to hew, cut, quarry' — it is used for cutting stone. God's voice cuts fire the way a mason cuts rock. Lightning is presented not as random electrical discharge but as the deliberate craftsmanship of the divine voice shaping fire into bolts.
8. The storm has moved south from Lebanon to the midbar Qadesh ('wilderness of Kadesh') — either Kadesh-barnea in the Negev or a northern Kadesh in Syria. The verb chil/yachil ('to writhe, shake, tremble, be in labor') describes the wilderness convulsing as though in labor pains. The uninhabited wasteland — the place with no audience — trembles before God's voice. God does not need spectators to be powerful.
9. The single word kavod as the temple's response is extraordinarily compressed. Everything the storm displays — power, majesty, dominion over nature — is captured in one word. The brevity is the point: when you have witnessed what God's voice can do, no elaborate speech is needed. One word suffices.
10. The rarity of mabbul makes this verse unusually weighty. Every Hebrew reader would hear the Genesis flood in this word. The psalm is saying: the God whose voice just shattered cedars and shook the wilderness is the same God who once unmade the world with water and who now reigns over those same waters. His sovereignty is both terrifying and total.
11. The ending creates a profound theological statement: the same power that breaks cedars blesses people. God's strength (oz) is not diminished when given to his people — it is shared. And the result of receiving the strength of the storm-God is not terror but shalom. This is one of the most concise statements of the paradox of divine power in the Psalter.

30

Summary: *A thanksgiving psalm celebrating rescue from the brink of death. The superscription associates it with the dedication of the house (the temple or David's palace). David praises the LORD for pulling him up from Sheol, recounts his complacency before the crisis ('I said in my prosperity, I shall never be moved'), confesses that God hid his face and he was dismayed, and then declares that God has turned his mourning into dancing and clothed him with joy.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The psalm's emotional honesty is arresting. David admits that prosperity made him complacent — 'In my ease I said: I will never be shaken' (v. 7). The Hebrew word shalvi ('my ease, my security, my prosperity') describes the dangerous comfort that comes from extended blessing. When everything goes well for long enough, the human heart starts to believe it deserves stability. Then God hid his face (histarta fanekha, v. 8), and the foundation collapsed. The psalm teaches that the prosperity itself was God's gift, and its removal was God's pedagogy. The most quoted line — 'Weeping may lodge for the night, but joy comes in the morning' (v. 6) — compresses an entire theology of suffering into a single sentence: sorrow is temporary and nocturnal; joy is permanent and diurnal. Darkness is the visitor; light is the resident.*

Translation Friction: *The superscription — mizmor shir chanukat ha-bayit le-David ('a psalm, a song for the dedication of the house, of David') — creates historical puzzlement. David did not build or dedicate the temple; Solomon did (1 Kings 8). The 'house' (bayit) may refer to David's palace (2 Samuel 5:11), or the superscription may indicate liturgical use at the later temple dedication, or at the Feast of Hanukkah (which takes its name from chanukah, 'dedication'). The psalm is indeed read during Hanukkah in Jewish tradition. The phrase 'you brought my soul up from Sheol' (v. 4) could be literal (near-death illness or battle wound) or figurative (a crisis so severe it felt like death). The psalm does not specify the nature of the crisis, which makes it universally applicable.*

Connections: *The descent-to-Sheol and rescue pattern connects to Jonah 2 (prayer from the belly of the fish), Psalm 18:4-6, and Psalm 116:3-8. The 'mourning into dancing' transformation (v. 12) echoes Jeremiah 31:13 ('I will turn their mourning into joy'). The 'morning joy' of verse 6 anticipates Lamentations 3:22-23 ('his mercies are new every morning'). The theological pattern — prosperity leading to complacency, crisis restoring dependence — runs through Deuteronomy 8:11-18 and Hosea 13:6.*

¹A psalm — a song for the dedication of the house. Of David.

²I will exalt you, O LORD, for you have drawn me up
and have not let my enemies gloat over me.

³O LORD my God, I cried to you for help,
and you healed me.

⁴O LORD, you brought my soul up from Sheol;
you kept me alive from among those going down to the pit.

⁵Sing praise to the LORD, you his faithful ones,
and give thanks to his holy name.

⁶For his anger lasts only a moment,
but his favor lasts a lifetime.
Weeping may lodge for the night,
but joy comes in the morning.

⁷As for me, I said in my ease:
"I will never be shaken."

⁸O LORD, by your favor you made my mountain stand strong;
you hid your face — I was dismayed.

⁹To you, O LORD, I called,
and to the Lord I pleaded for mercy.

¹⁰What profit is there in my death,
in my going down to the pit?
Can the dust praise you?
Can it declare your faithfulness?

¹¹Hear, O LORD, and be gracious to me!
O LORD, be my helper!

¹²You have turned my mourning into dancing;
you have removed my sackcloth
and clothed me with joy,

¹³so that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent.
O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The superscription combines *mizmor* ('psalm,' a musical composition) with *shir* ('song,' a vocal piece) — this is both instrumental and vocal. *Chanukat ha-bayit* ('the dedication of the house') uses the word *chanukah*, from which the Jewish festival takes its name. The 'house' is ambiguous — David's palace, the temple site, or a future liturgical context. In WLC versification, this superscription is verse 1.
2. *Dalah* ('to draw up') from a cistern or well creates a vivid image of depth and rescue. The *bor* ('pit') of Psalm 28:1 and the *Sheol* of verse 4 are the deep places from which God draws the speaker up. The well metaphor implies darkness, confinement, and helplessness at the bottom.
3. *Vattirpaeni* ('and you healed me') uses the verb *rapa* ('to heal, cure, restore'). This suggests the crisis may have been illness — or the word may be used broadly for any restoration of well-being. Either way, the pattern is simple and complete: I cried (*shivvati*), you healed (*tirpaeni*). The brevity mirrors the experience — when God acts, the transformation is swift.
4. The preposition *min* ('from') in *min-Sheol* could mean 'from Sheol' (he was already there) or 'from going to Sheol' (he was headed there). Either way, the proximity to death was extreme. The speaker does not overstate the crisis — he uses the strongest possible language because the crisis was genuinely life-threatening.
5. *Chasidav* ('his faithful ones, his devoted ones') — those who are bound to God by *chesed*, who have received and reciprocated God's covenant love. They are summoned to *zammeru* ('sing, make music') and *hodu* ('give thanks, confess, acknowledge'). The phrase *zekher qodsho* ('the remembrance/memorial of his holiness' or 'his holy name') treats God's holiness as something to be commemorated and declared publicly.
6. *Rega* ('a moment, an instant') is the smallest unit of time the Hebrew language can express. God's anger occupies a *rega*; God's favor occupies *chayyim* ('a whole life'). The disproportion is the point — wrath is a flicker; grace is the main event.
6. The verb *yalin* ('to lodge, to spend the night') applied to weeping treats sorrow as a temporary visitor. *Rinnah* ('a shout of joy, a ringing cry') is not quiet relief but vocal, public jubilation.
7. The phrase *bal-emmaot* ('I will not be shaken') echoes Psalm 21:8 and Psalm 16:8 — but there the stability comes from trusting in God, while here it comes from self-confidence born of prosperity. The same words carry opposite theological weight depending on their source.
8. *Histarta fanekha* ('you hid your face') is one of the most frightening phrases in the Psalter. The hidden face of God means the withdrawal of attention, favor, protection, and presence. It is the experience behind Psalm 22:1 ('why have you forsaken me?') and behind every dark night of the soul. Here, it serves a pedagogical purpose: God hid his face to show the speaker what his life was like without it.
9. Two names — *YHWH* and *Adonai* ('Lord, Master') — and two verbs — *eqa* ('I called') and *etchannan* ('I pleaded for grace/mercy'). The shift from complacent self-confidence (v. 7) to desperate prayer (v. 9) is the crisis itself: the speaker who said 'I will never be shaken' is now begging for mercy. The complacency had to break before the prayer could begin.

10. This argument — the dead cannot praise God — appears repeatedly in the Psalter (Psalm 6:5, 88:10-12, 115:17). It reflects a pre-resurrection understanding where Sheol is a place of silence and diminished existence. The speaker leverages this theology: keep me alive so I can keep worshipping.
11. Three imperatives in rapid succession: *shema* ('hear'), *chonnenei* ('be gracious to me'), *heyeh ozer li* ('be a helper to me'). The brevity reflects urgency — this is not elaborate liturgical prayer but compressed crisis communication. Every word is essential.
12. The reversal pairs are precise: mourning/dancing, sackcloth/joy, removal/clothing. Each pair represents a complete inversion — not gradual improvement but sudden, dramatic transformation. This is the 'morning joy' of verse 6 made concrete in the speaker's wardrobe.
13. *Kavod* ('glory') as a reference to the speaker's soul or inner being appears also in Psalm 16:9 ('my glory rejoices') and Psalm 57:8 ('awake, my glory'). The human *kavod* is the reflection of divine *kavod* — the part of a person capable of worship. To silence it through death would be to extinguish a flame that was meant to burn in praise.

31

Summary: *A psalm of David that moves from desperate plea to triumphant trust. The psalmist commits his spirit into the LORD's hands, cries out from a state of siege — scorned by enemies, forgotten by friends, his body wasting — and then pivots sharply into praise for the God who heard him. The psalm oscillates between terror and confidence, between the language of entrapment and the language of wide-open spaces, ultimately landing on a call for all who wait on the LORD to be strong.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Verse 6 in Hebrew (v. 5 in English) — 'Into your hand I commit my spirit' (be-yadekha afqid ruchi) — became the most famous deathbed prayer in Western civilization when Jesus quoted it from the cross (Luke 23:46). But in its original context, this is not a dying man's last words; it is a living man's act of trust in the middle of crisis. David is not surrendering to death — he is surrendering to God instead of surrendering to fear. The verb *paqad* in the Hiphil (*afqid*) means 'to deposit, to entrust for safekeeping,' like leaving valuables with a trusted guardian. David treats his own life-breath (*ruach*) as something too precious for him to protect, so he hands it to God. The psalm's emotional range is extraordinary: it contains some of the most desolate language in the Psalter ('I am forgotten like a dead man out of mind, I have become like a broken vessel') alongside some of the most exuberant ('How great is your goodness that you have stored up for those who fear you').*

Translation Friction: *The superscription assigns the psalm to David (le-David), and the biographical details — enemies, conspiracies, a besieged city — fit many episodes in David's life. However, the phrase 'fortified city' (*ir mator*) in verse 22 has generated debate: some read it as David's confidence during a siege (perhaps at Keilah, 1 Samuel 23), while others emend to 'city of distress.' The LXX reads 'city of siege' without emendation. The verb *afqid* ('I commit/deposit') in verse 6 is a commercial term — entrusting goods for safekeeping — applied to the most intimate possible object: one's own spirit. This metaphor treats God as a banker of souls, which is a strikingly transactional image embedded in what is otherwise pure trust language.*

Connections: *The phrase 'Into your hand I commit my spirit' (v. 6) is quoted by Jesus on the cross in Luke 23:46 and by Stephen at his stoning in Acts 7:59. Verse 14 — 'My times are in your hand' — became a foundational text for Jewish and Christian theology of divine sovereignty over individual destiny. Psalm 31 shares vocabulary and themes with Psalm 22 (the cry of dereliction) and Psalm 71 (the aging sufferer who trusts in God). The language of being 'hidden in the shelter of your presence' (v. 21) echoes Psalm 27:5 and Psalm 91:1. Jeremiah appears to echo this psalm in several passages (Jeremiah 20:10 mirrors v. 14 closely), leading some scholars to call this a 'Jeremician psalm.'*

¹For the director of music. A psalm of David.

²In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge.
Let me never be put to shame.
In your righteousness, deliver me.

³Turn your ear toward me — rescue me quickly.
Be a rock of strength for me,
a fortified house to save me.

⁴For you are my rock and my fortress.
For the sake of your name,
lead me and guide me.

⁵Pull me out of the net they have hidden for me,
for you are my refuge.

⁶Into your hand I commit my spirit.
You have redeemed me, O LORD, God of truth.

⁷I despise those who cling to worthless idols,
but I — I trust in the LORD.

⁸I will rejoice and be glad in your faithful love,
for you have seen my affliction —
you have known the distress of my soul.

⁹You have not handed me over to the enemy.
You have set my feet in a wide-open place.

¹⁰Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress.
My eye wastes away from grief —
my soul and my body as well.

¹¹My life is spent in sorrow,
and my years in groaning.
My strength fails because of my affliction,
and my bones waste away.

¹²Because of all my adversaries I have become a disgrace —
especially to my neighbors — and a terror to my friends.
Those who see me in the street flee from me.

¹³I am forgotten like a dead man, gone from the heart.
I have become like a shattered vessel.

¹⁴For I have heard the whispering of many —
terror on every side! —
as they conspire together against me,
plotting to take my life.

¹⁵But I — I trust in you, O LORD.
I say, 'You are my God.'

¹⁶My times are in your hand.
Deliver me from the hand of my enemies
and from those who pursue me.

¹⁷Let your face shine upon your servant.
Save me in your faithful love.

¹⁸O LORD, let me not be put to shame, for I have called on you.
Let the wicked be shamed;
let them be silenced in Sheol.

¹⁹Let lying lips be struck silent —
those that speak arrogantly against the righteous
with pride and contempt.

²⁰How abundant is your goodness
that you have stored up for those who fear you,
that you have worked for those who take refuge in you
in the sight of all people!

²¹You hide them in the shelter of your presence
from the schemes of men.
You store them in a shelter
from the strife of tongues.

²²Blessed be the LORD,
for He has shown me His wondrous faithful love
in a city under siege.

²³I had said in my alarm,
'I am cut off from your sight!'
But you heard the voice of my pleas for mercy
when I cried out to you.

²⁴Love the LORD, all you His faithful ones!
The LORD preserves those who are trustworthy
and fully repays the one who acts in pride.

²⁵Be strong, and let your heart take courage,
all you who wait for the LORD.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The superscription *la-menatseach* ('for the director of music') appears in fifty-five psalms and indicates liturgical use — this psalm was performed in corporate worship, not merely recorded as private prayer. The preposition *le-* in *le-David* can mean 'of David,' 'for David,' or 'belonging to the Davidic collection.'
2. The verb *chasah* ('to take refuge') is one of the Psalter's signature words, appearing over twenty-five times. It is concrete in origin — to flee to a sheltering rock, a fortress, a city of refuge — and metaphorical in application. David does not merely believe in God; he has physically and spiritually placed himself under God's protection.
2. The phrase *be-tsidqatekha palleteni* ('in your righteousness deliver me') makes God's moral character the basis for the appeal. *tsedaqah* here is not abstract justice but relational faithfulness — God's commitment to set things right for those in covenant with Him.
3. The verb *hatteh* ('incline, turn') asks God to bend down — an anthropomorphic image of the transcendent God lowering Himself to hear. The urgency is marked by *meherah* ('quickly, speedily'). Three fortress images pile up: *tsur maoz* ('rock of strength'), *beit metsudot* ('house of fortifications'), and the implied shelter behind them. David is not asking for comfort but for military protection — walls, rock, stronghold.

4. The shift from petition to declaration — 'you are my rock' (sal'i) — is characteristic of psalms of trust. David does not merely request that God become his fortress; he asserts that God already is. The phrase le-ma'an shimkha ('for the sake of your name') introduces a critical motive: God's own reputation is at stake. If God's declared protegee is destroyed, God's name is diminished before the nations.
5. The image shifts from fortress to hunting trap. The resheth ('net') is a snare laid in secret (tamenu, 'they have hidden') by unnamed enemies. The juxtaposition of 'net' and 'refuge' creates a spatial contrast: the enemies close in from below with traps, while God provides escape from above. The pronoun 'they' (tamenu) is deliberately vague — the threat is everywhere and from everyone.
6. The Hiphil of paqad (afqid) is a technical term for depositing goods with a trustee — see Exodus 22:6-12 for the legal framework. The depositor retains ownership; the trustee assumes responsibility for safekeeping. Applied to ruach ('spirit'), this creates a remarkable image: God holds my life in trust for me.
6. El emet ('God of truth') uses emet in its full semantic range — truth, reliability, faithfulness, constancy. God is not merely truthful in speech but dependable in character. The word emet shares a root with amen and emunah ('faithfulness').
7. The phrase havlei shav ('vanities of emptiness') combines two words for nothingness — hevel ('vapor, breath, vanity') and shav ('emptiness, falsehood, worthlessness'). The phrase likely refers to idol worship but encompasses any misplaced trust. The emphatic pronoun va-ani ('but I') creates a stark contrast: while others cling to vapor, David clings to the LORD.
8. The verb ra'itah ('you have seen') is not passive observation but attentive care — God sees affliction the way a parent sees a child's pain, with intent to respond. The verb yadata ('you have known') deepens this: God does not merely observe David's trouble from a distance; He knows it intimately, from inside. The pair 'seen' and 'known' together mean comprehensive awareness combined with compassionate engagement.
9. The noun merchav ('broad place, wide space') comes from rachav ('to be wide, spacious'). It is the opposite of tsar ('narrow, constricted'), from which tsarah ('distress, trouble') derives. Hebrew literally equates trouble with tightness and salvation with spaciousness. Psalm 18:19 uses the same image: 'He brought me out into a broad place.'
10. The sudden shift from praise (vv. 8-9) back to lament (vv. 10-14) is characteristic of psalms that refuse to smooth over the rawness of experience. The verb ashshab ('to waste away, to grow dim') describes physical deterioration — the eye literally failing from weeping. The three-part list (eye, soul, body/belly) traces the damage from surface to interior: tears ruin the eyes, grief erodes the soul, and the body itself collapses.
11. The phrase kalu be-yagon chayyai ('my life is consumed in grief') uses kalah ('to be completed, to be exhausted') — grief has used up his entire life. The word avoni is ambiguous: it can mean 'my iniquity' or 'my affliction/punishment.' Context favors 'affliction' here, since the psalm otherwise insists on the psalmist's innocence. The bones wasting away (atsamai asheshu) describes the total physical collapse that prolonged distress produces.
12. The social dimension of suffering is devastating here. The psalmist is not merely in pain but in shame (cherpah, 'reproach, disgrace'). His neighbors recoil, his friends are afraid of him, and strangers in the street actively avoid him. The verb nadedu ('they fled, they wandered away') suggests people crossing the street to avoid contact. Suffering has made him a social contagion.
13. The phrase mi-lev ('from the heart') specifies the kind of forgetting: not merely failing to recall a name but erasing someone from the place where affection lives. The keli oved ('perishing vessel') is a clay pot — cheap, common, and unrepairable once cracked. In a culture where pottery was disposable, this image carried the force of 'thrown in the garbage.'
14. The phrase magor mi-saviv ('terror on every side') appears in Jeremiah 6:25, 20:3, 20:10, and 46:5, leading many scholars to connect this psalm with Jeremiah's experience. In Jeremiah 20:10, the prophet quotes almost this exact line: 'I have heard the whispering of many — terror on every side! — Denounce him! Let us denounce him!' Whether David influenced Jeremiah or vice versa, the phrase captures the paranoia of being surrounded by conspirators who plot openly while the target listens helplessly.
15. The emphatic va-ani ('but I') makes the same contrast as verse 7: whatever others do, however desperate the situation, David's position is fixed. The declaration Elohai attah ('You are my God') is the simplest and most radical statement of faith in the Hebrew Bible — a personal claim on the God of the universe. The possessive 'my' is the word that matters most.
16. The noun ittot (plural of et, 'time') covers the full range of temporal experience — moments, seasons, appointed times, life-stages. In Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, the same word structures the famous 'a time for every purpose' passage. Here, David places all of those times under God's sovereign control.
17. The priestly blessing of Numbers 6:25 — 'The LORD make His face to shine upon you' — is here turned into personal petition. The 'shining face' of God means favor, attention, delight — the opposite of the hidden face that means abandonment. David calls himself avdekha ('your servant'), a title of both humility and privilege: a servant belongs to his master, and the master is obligated to protect what belongs to him.
18. The plea returns to the opening theme of shame (bosh). The logic is distributive: shame must fall somewhere — either on David for trusting God in vain, or on the wicked for opposing God's servant. David asks that it fall on the right party. The verb yiddemu ('let them be silenced') and the destination li-She'ol ('to Sheol, the underworld') combine: the wicked should be reduced to the silence of death.
19. The adjective ataq ('arrogant, insolent, presumptuous') describes speech that overreaches — words that are too bold, too brazen, too dismissive of the righteous. The combination of ga'avah ('pride') and buz ('contempt') describes the particular cruelty of those who mock the suffering of the faithful.
20. The verb tsafan ('to hide, to treasure up, to store') appears in Proverbs 2:7 with the same meaning: God stores up wisdom for the upright. The image suggests that God's goodness is not diminished by the delay in its appearance — it accumulates, like treasure in a vault, waiting for the right moment.

21. The phrase *be-seter panekha* ('in the hiding place of your face/presence') creates a paradox: God's face, which David asked to shine (v. 17), now becomes a hiding place for the faithful. The divine presence is simultaneously radiance for the beloved and concealment from enemies. The 'strife of tongues' (*riv leshonot*) identifies the primary weapon: not swords but words — slander, accusation, gossip.
22. The verb *hifli* ('He made wonderful, He showed wondrously') from the root *pala* ('to be extraordinary, to do wonders') — the same root that gives us the noun *pele* ('wonder'). God's faithful love (*chesed*) is not merely adequate but astonishing. The phrase *be-ir matsor* ('in a city of siege/fortress') is debated: it may mean God showed love while David was besieged, or it may mean God's love was itself like a fortified city. Both readings are theologically rich.
23. The word *chofzi* can mean 'haste' or 'alarm/panic.' The LXX renders it with *ekstasis* ('ecstasy' or 'astonishment'), suggesting an altered emotional state rather than simple hurry. The honesty of this verse is remarkable — David admits that his faith wavered, that he believed God had stopped watching. The psalm does not pretend that trust is uninterrupted.
24. The address shifts from God to the congregation. The *chasedav* ('His faithful ones') are those bound to God by *chesed* — the covenant-loyal community. The verb *notser* ('preserves, guards') and the verb *meshallem* ('repays, recompenses') create a double verdict: faithfulness is guarded; pride is repaid. The word *yeter* ('excess, abundance') modifies the repayment — God does not merely match but exceeds the measure of the proud person's arrogance.
25. The psalm closes with a communal exhortation. The two verbs *chizqu* ('be strong') and *ya'amets levavkhem* ('let your heart be courageous') are a standard pair for encouragement in the face of danger (cf. Deuteronomy 31:6, Joshua 1:6). The final word — *ha-meyachalim la-YHWH* ('those who wait/hope for the LORD') — defines the audience: people still in the middle of their crisis, still waiting for deliverance, not yet arrived at resolution. The psalm ends not with completed salvation but with sustained hope.

32

Summary: *One of the seven traditional penitential psalms, Psalm 32 is David's testimony of what happened when he tried to conceal sin and what happened when he finally confessed. The psalm opens with a double blessing on the forgiven, describes the physical torment of unconfessed guilt, narrates the moment of confession, and then expands into instruction for others. It is both personal testimony and wisdom teaching — a psalm that moves from autobiography to theology to exhortation.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 32 contains the most concentrated deployment of Hebrew sin-vocabulary in the Psalter. Three words for sin appear in the opening two verses: pesha ('transgression, rebellion'), chata'ah ('sin, missing the mark'), and avon ('iniquity, moral crookedness'). These are not synonyms — they describe different dimensions of human failure. pesha is willful rebellion against authority; chata'ah is deviation from the right path; avon is the twisted distortion of what should be straight. Correspondingly, three words for forgiveness appear: nasui ('lifted, carried away'), kesui ('covered'), and lo yachshov ('not counted, not reckoned'). The three sins receive three removals. This is not accidental; the psalm is a theological architecture of complete forgiveness that addresses every category of human moral failure. The physical description of concealed guilt (vv. 3-4) — bones wasting, moisture dried up like summer heat — is among the most visceral accounts of psychosomatic suffering in ancient literature.*

Translation Friction: *The superscription calls this a maskil le-David ('a skillful poem of David'). The word maskil appears in thirteen psalm titles and its meaning is debated — it may mean 'instructive poem,' 'skillful composition,' or 'contemplative piece.' The traditional association with David's guilt over Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11-12) is not stated in the text but has been assumed since early rabbinic interpretation. The shift from first-person confession (vv. 1-7) to second-person instruction (vv. 8-9) has led some scholars to suggest the psalm combines two originally separate compositions, but this shift from testimony to teaching is a natural movement in wisdom literature.*

Connections: *Paul quotes verses 1-2 in Romans 4:7-8 as proof that righteousness is reckoned apart from works — God's forgiveness is a gift, not a wage. This makes Psalm 32 a foundational text for the doctrine of justification by faith. The three sin-words (pesha, chata'ah, avon) also appear together in Exodus 34:7, where God proclaims His own character as one who forgives all three categories. Psalm 51 is the other great Davidic penitential psalm and shares vocabulary with Psalm 32, but where Psalm 51 is the prayer of confession, Psalm 32 is the testimony after forgiveness has been received. The two psalms are complementary: Psalm 51 is the crisis; Psalm 32 is the aftermath.*

¹Of David. A maskil.

Blessed is the one whose transgression is lifted away,
whose sin is covered.

²Blessed is the person to whom the LORD does not count iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

³When I kept silent, my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.

⁴For day and night your hand was heavy upon me.
My vitality was changed
as in the dry heat of summer. Selah.

⁵My sin I made known to you,
and my iniquity I did not conceal.
I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD' —
and you lifted away the guilt of my sin. Selah.

⁶Therefore let everyone who is faithful pray to you
at a time when you may be found.
Surely when the great waters rise,
they will not reach him.

⁷You are my hiding place.
You preserve me from trouble.
You surround me with shouts of deliverance. Selah.

⁸I will instruct you and teach you
in the way you should go.
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

⁹Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding,
whose movement must be curbed with bit and bridle —
otherwise they will not come near you.

¹⁰Many are the sorrows of the wicked,
but the one who trusts in the LORD —
faithful love surrounds him.

¹¹Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous!
Shout for joy, all you who are upright in heart!

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The word maskil in the superscription has generated extensive scholarly debate. It may derive from sakal ('to be prudent, to instruct') and thus mean 'instructive psalm' or 'psalm of insight.' The LXX renders it synesis ('understanding'). Whatever its exact meaning, it marks this psalm as having a didactic purpose — it teaches something.
1. The passive participles nesui ('lifted away') and kesui ('covered') describe the state of the forgiven person, not the act of forgiveness. The person is walking around with their transgression already removed. The blessing is pronounced on a present condition, not a future hope.

2. Paul's use of this verse in Romans 4:7-8 (quoting the LXX) became the cornerstone of Protestant justification theology. The non-imputation of sin (lo yachshov avon) is read as the positive imputation of righteousness — a forensic declaration that changes the sinner's standing before God. Whether the psalmist intended this level of systematic theology is debatable, but the accounting metaphor (chashav) certainly supports a forensic reading.
2. The phrase ein be-rucho remiyyah ('in whose spirit there is no deceit') is sometimes read as a second condition for blessedness: the forgiven person must also be honest. Others read it as a result of forgiveness: once the sin is dealt with, the need for self-deception vanishes. Both readings are theologically coherent.
3. The psychosomatic description here anticipates modern understanding of the physical effects of unresolved guilt: insomnia, exhaustion, physical deterioration. The Hebrew poets understood intuitively that concealed guilt attacks the body. The 'roaring' (she'agah) may refer to wordless cries of pain — the body's protest against the soul's dishonesty.
4. The word leshadi is one of the most debated terms in the psalm. Some derive it from lashad ('moisture, freshness, vigor'), others emend to libbadi ('my heart'). The LXX reads 'I was turned to wretchedness.' Whatever the exact reading, the image is clear: something essential within David was desiccated by the sustained pressure of God's disciplining hand.
4. Selah appears here, marking a musical or liturgical pause. Its exact meaning remains unknown, but its placement after the description of divine pressure and physical collapse suggests a moment for the congregation to absorb the weight of what has been described.
5. The verb nasata ('you lifted, you carried away') is the same root as nesui in verse 1. God lifts the iniquity off David's back and carries it away. The wordplay between lo khissiti ('I did not cover') in verse 5 and kesui ('covered') in verse 1 is deliberate: when the sinner stops covering sin, God covers it. When the sinner tries to cover sin, God exposes the consequences through suffering.
5. The phrase avon chatta'ti ('the guilt/iniquity of my sin') stacks two sin-words together, as if to say: God removed not just the sin itself but the guilt that the sin produced — the entire complex of offense, shame, and consequence.
6. The phrase le-et metso ('at a time of finding') echoes Isaiah 55:6: 'Seek the LORD while He may be found.' The implication is that there is a window for confession — a time when God's ear is open — and wisdom seizes it. The 'great waters' (mayim rabbim) symbolize overwhelming catastrophe in the Psalter (cf. Psalm 18:16, 69:1-2). The confessed sinner is elevated above the flood; the one who refuses to confess drowns in guilt. David's experience becomes a paradigm: confess while there is time, before the waters rise.
7. The declaration attah seter li ('you are my hiding place') transforms the earlier imagery: God was the heavy hand of discipline (v. 4), but now He is the shelter of protection. The phrase ronnei fallet ('shouts/songs of deliverance') describes David as encircled — not by enemies but by celebrations of rescue. The verb tesoveveni ('you surround me') uses the same verb that could describe a siege, but here the surrounding is joyful. Where guilt surrounded David with groaning, forgiveness surrounds him with songs.
8. The speaker shifts — most interpreters read this as God speaking to David, though some read it as David speaking to others. The verb askil (Hiphil of sakal, 'to make wise, to instruct') connects to the superscription maskil. Three verbs of guidance pile up: instruct, teach, counsel. The phrase i'atsah alekha eini ('I will counsel with my eye upon you') means intimate, personal guidance — not a rulebook but a relationship. God watches and directs in real time, like a parent guiding a child with a glance.
9. The animal comparison is sharp: a horse or mule (pered) requires physical force (bit and bridle) because it lacks understanding (ein havin). The implication is that David was acting like a stubborn animal during his period of concealment — God had to use physical pressure (v. 4) because David refused to respond to wisdom. The instruction is: respond to God's gentle eye (v. 8), not His heavy hand (v. 4). Be teachable, not stubborn.
10. The contrast is stark: the wicked have makh'ovim ('pains, sorrows') as their surrounding environment, while the trusting person is surrounded (yesovevennu, the same verb as v. 7) by chesed ('faithful love'). The verb savav ('to surround') appears in both verse 7 and verse 10, creating a frame: what surrounds you depends on where you stand. The wicked are encircled by pain; the faithful are encircled by love.
11. The psalm ends with communal celebration. Three verbs of joy — simchu ('be glad'), gil'u ('rejoice'), harninu ('shout for joy') — address two groups: tsaddiqim ('righteous ones') and yishrei lev ('upright in heart'). The irony is rich: this is a penitential psalm — it began with the confession of grave sin — yet it ends with the righteous rejoicing. The forgiven sinner is now counted among the righteous. The upright heart of verse 11 is the spirit without deceit from verse 2. Forgiveness does not merely restore the sinner to neutral status; it places him among the rejoicing righteous.

33

Summary: *Psalm 33 is a hymn of praise to the LORD as Creator and Sovereign, calling the righteous to worship with instruments and a new song. The psalm moves from the call to praise (vv. 1-3) through the reasons for praise: God's word is reliable (vv. 4-5), His word created the cosmos (vv. 6-9), His plan overrules the nations (vv. 10-12), He watches all humanity from heaven (vv. 13-15), military power cannot save (vv. 16-17), and only those who fear Him and hope in His faithful love are truly secure (vv. 18-22). It is one of the few psalms in Book I without a Davidic superscription.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 33 contains one of the Hebrew Bible's most concise statements of creation theology: 'By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host' (v. 6). This single verse became a cornerstone of the doctrine of creation ex nihilo — God speaks and reality appears. The verb tsivvah ('He commanded') in verse 9 and the result vayyaamod ('it stood firm') compress the entire creation narrative into two words: command and existence. There is no effort, no struggle, no theogonic battle. God speaks; the cosmos obeys. This is creation as pure speech-act. The psalm also offers a devastating critique of military power: the war-horse is a 'vain hope for deliverance' (v. 17), and no king is saved by the size of his army (v. 16). In a world where Near Eastern kings boasted of their chariots and cavalry, this psalm says their entire military apparatus is irrelevant to the question of actual security.*

Translation Friction: *This is one of the 'orphan psalms' in Book I — it has no superscription attributing it to David or anyone else. The LXX adds 'of David,' but the Hebrew text stands alone. Some scholars note that Psalm 33 has exactly twenty-two verses, matching the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet, and suggest it may have originally been an acrostic that was reworked. The phrase shir chadash ('new song') in verse 3 is intriguing — what makes a song 'new'? Some interpreters argue it refers to a fresh composition for a specific occasion; others see it as a theological statement: every encounter with God's faithfulness requires a response that cannot be borrowed from the past.*

Connections: *The opening call — 'Rejoice in the LORD, you righteous' — echoes the final verse of Psalm 32, creating a literary link between the two psalms (some scholars treat Psalm 33 as an extended response to Psalm 32's closing exhortation). The creation-by-word theology of verses 6-9 connects to Genesis 1 (where God creates by speaking), John 1:1-3 (where the Word is the agent of creation), and Hebrews 11:3 (where the worlds were framed by the word of God). The critique of military power (vv. 16-17) echoes Psalm 20:7 ('Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God') and Isaiah 31:1 ('Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses').*

¹Shout for joy in the LORD, you righteous!

Praise is fitting for the upright.

²Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre.

With the ten-stringed harp, make music to Him.

³Sing to Him a new song.

Play skillfully with a shout of triumph.

⁴For the word of the LORD is upright,
and all His work is done in faithfulness.

⁵He loves righteousness and justice.

The earth is full of the faithful love of the LORD.

⁶By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,
and all their host by the breath of His mouth.

⁷He gathers the waters of the sea as in a heap.
He puts the deep waters in storehouses.

⁸May all the earth fear the LORD.
May all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.

⁹For He spoke, and it came to be.
He commanded, and it stood firm.

¹⁰The LORD frustrates the plans of the nations.
He thwarts the purposes of the peoples.

¹¹The plan of the LORD stands forever,
the purposes of His heart to all generations.

¹²Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD,
the people He has chosen as His own inheritance.

¹³From heaven the LORD looks down.
He sees all the children of humanity.

¹⁴From the place where He dwells
He gazes on all the inhabitants of the earth.

¹⁵He who fashions all their hearts alike,
He who understands all their deeds.

¹⁶A king is not saved by the size of his army.
A warrior is not delivered by great strength.

¹⁷The war-horse is a false hope for victory.
Despite its great strength, it cannot save.

¹⁸See — the eye of the LORD is on those who fear Him,
on those who hope in His faithful love,

¹⁹and to keep them alive in famine.
to deliver their lives from death

²⁰Our soul waits for the LORD.
He remains our help and our shield.

²¹For in Him our heart rejoices,
because in His holy name we trust.

²²Let your faithful love, O LORD, be upon us,
just as we have placed our hope in you.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb *rannenu* ('shout for joy, sing aloud') is more vigorous than ordinary singing — it is an exuberant, full-throated cry. The adjective *na'avah* ('fitting, seemly, beautiful') suggests that praise is not merely an obligation but an aesthetic match: righteous people and praise go together naturally, like music and rhythm. Praise looks right on them.

2. The kinnor ('lyre') was a portable stringed instrument associated with David (1 Samuel 16:23). The nevel asor ('ten-stringed harp' or 'ten-stringed lute') was a larger instrument. Together they represent the full ensemble of Israelite worship music. The verb *zammeru* ('make music, sing praise') is the root of *mizmor* ('psalm'), connecting this instrument-call to the Psalter itself.
3. The phrase *shir chadash* ('new song') appears six times in the Hebrew Bible (here, Psalms 40:3, 96:1, 98:1, 144:9, and Isaiah 42:10). It does not merely mean a recently composed song but a song that responds to a fresh act of God — new mercy demands new music. The adverb *hetivu* ('do well, play skillfully') demands excellence: worship is not a casual performance but a craft requiring the best the musician can offer. The *teruah* ('shout, blast, acclamation') adds a vocal and possibly instrumental dimension — a trumpet-like blast of triumph.
4. The adjective *yashar* ('straight, upright, right') applied to God's word means it never deviates, never misleads, never curves away from truth. The noun *emunah* ('faithfulness, reliability, constancy') applied to God's works means everything God does is rooted in His unshakable character. Word and work are aligned — what God says and what God does are a single consistent reality.
5. The pair *tsedaqah u-mishpat* ('righteousness and justice') describes God's moral character as both relational (*tsedaqah*) and judicial (*mishpat*). The second line makes a staggering claim: *chesed YHWH male'ah ha-arets* ('the faithful love of the LORD fills the earth'). Not the temple, not Israel, not the heavens — the entire earth is saturated with God's covenant love. This is a universal theological statement embedded in a hymn of Israelite worship.
6. The word *ruach* ('breath/spirit/wind') creates a bridge between the physical and spiritual dimensions of creation. When God speaks, His breath carries the words, and that breath is also the Spirit that gives life. Genesis 1:2 ('the Spirit of God hovered over the waters') and Genesis 2:7 ('God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life') use the same word. Creation is God breathing reality into existence.
7. The image of God gathering the sea *ka-ned* ('as a heap, as a mound') echoes the crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 15:8) and the Jordan (Joshua 3:13, 16), where the waters stood in a heap. God treats the ocean — the most powerful and chaotic force in the ancient world — like a commodity to be stored in warehouses (*otsarot*, 'storehouses, treasuries'). The *tehomot* ('deeps, abysses') that terrified ancient Near Eastern peoples are God's inventory.
8. The scope is universal: *kol ha-arets* ('all the earth') and *kol yoshvei tevel* ('all inhabitants of the world'). The verb *yaguru* ('let them tremble, let them stand in awe') is stronger than ordinary fear — it describes the trembling that comes in the presence of overwhelming power. If God can gather oceans and store abysses, the only rational response from every human being is reverent awe.
9. The compression of this verse is itself a literary achievement — four words per line, with no connective tissue, no elaboration. The form mirrors the content: God's creative speech is terse, efficient, absolute. The echoes of Genesis 1 ('and God said... and it was so') are unmistakable, but the psalm compresses the creation narrative's repetitive formula into a single devastating couplet.
10. The verb *hefir* ('He broke, He annulled, He frustrated') from *parar* ('to break, to violate') means God actively dismantles the strategies of nations. The verb *heni* ('He thwarted, He made futile') from *nu* ('to shake, to hinder') means God shakes their plans until they collapse. The parallelism between *goyim* ('nations') and *ammim* ('peoples') is universal: no political entity, however powerful, can execute plans that contradict God's purposes.
11. The contrast with verse 10 is total: nations' plans are frustrated; God's plan stands (*ta'amod*, the same verb as v. 9 — what God speaks stands, what God plans stands). The phrase *machshevot libbo* ('the purposes of His heart') is striking — God's plans are not cold calculations but expressions of His heart's intent. The permanence markers *le-olam* ('forever') and *le-dor va-dor* ('to generation and generation') emphasize that God's purposes outlast every empire.
12. The *ashrei* ('blessed') formula from Psalm 32:1-2 returns, now applied not to an individual but to a nation. The word *nachalah* ('inheritance, possession, heritage') is a land-distribution term: in the conquest narratives, each tribe received its *nachalah*. Here the image is reversed: the people are God's inheritance. God has chosen Israel the way a firstborn chooses an estate — they are His valued possession.
13. The verb *hibbit* ('He looked, He gazed attentively') implies focused, purposeful observation — not a casual glance but a sovereign survey. The scope is universal: *kol bene ha-adam* ('all the sons of humanity'). God's vision is not limited to Israel; He observes every human being. This verse sets up the futility of military confidence in verses 16-17: if God sees everything from above, no hidden strategy or superior force can escape His notice.
14. The phrase *mekhon shivto* ('the established place of His dwelling') refers to God's heavenly throne — the fixed, permanent seat from which He governs. The verb *hishgiach* ('He looked out, He peered, He observed carefully') suggests looking through a window or from a watchtower — attentive surveillance of the entire earth.
15. The verb *yotser* ('the one who forms, who fashions') is the potter-word — the same verb used in Genesis 2:7 for God forming humanity from clay. Because God shaped every human heart, He understands every human motive. The verb *mevin* ('He understands, He discerns') goes beyond observation to comprehension. God does not merely see what people do; He grasps why they do it. The word *yachad* ('together, alike') means God fashioned all human hearts with the same capacity — no one has a heart so complex that God cannot read it.
16. The declaration *ein hammelek shosha* ('the king is not saved') would have been politically provocative in any ancient Near Eastern context, where kings derived their legitimacy from military victories. The phrase *be-rov chayil* ('by abundance of force') and *be-rov koach* ('by abundance of strength') dismiss the two things every king cultivated: large armies and powerful soldiers. The psalm declares both irrelevant to actual security.

17. The word sheqer ('falsehood, deception, lie') applied to the horse is remarkable — the horse literally lies to you. It promises security and cannot deliver. The sus ('horse') in ancient Israel was primarily a military animal — war-horses pulled chariots and carried cavalry. Deuteronomy 17:16 explicitly forbade the king from multiplying horses, recognizing that military hardware becomes a substitute for trust in God. The psalm agrees: the horse is a beautiful, powerful lie.
18. The particle hinneh ('behold, see, look!') commands attention — after dismissing armies and war-horses, the psalm reveals where true security lies. The 'eye of the LORD' (ein YHWH) is the same comprehensive vision from verses 13-14, now focused specifically on the faithful. Being seen by God — which could be terrifying for the wicked — is comfort for those who fear Him and hope in His chesed.
19. The two threats — death (mavet) and famine (ra'av) — represent the ultimate physical dangers. God's watchful eye does not merely observe; it intervenes. The infinitives lehatsil ('to deliver') and lechayotam ('to keep them alive') describe ongoing, active preservation. The God who created the cosmos by a word now sustains individual lives through attentive care.
20. The shift to first-person plural (nafshenu, 'our soul') marks the congregation's response to the psalm's teaching. The verb chikketah ('has waited, waits') implies patient, expectant endurance — not passive waiting but active trust sustained over time. The titles ezrenu ('our help') and maginnenu ('our shield') compress God's role to two essentials: He assists and He protects.
21. The logic is circular in the best sense: trust produces joy, and joy confirms trust. The phrase be-shem qodsho ('in His holy name') means trust is placed not in an abstract concept but in the revealed character (shem, 'name') of God — everything God has shown Himself to be. The holiness (qodesh) of the name means it is set apart, utterly reliable, incorruptible.
22. The psalm closes with a prayer that matches God's faithful love (chesed) to the congregation's hope (yichal). The phrase ka'asher yichalnnu lakh ('just as we have hoped in you') does not demand a proportional transaction — it asks that the reality of God's love match the depth of the congregation's trust. The psalm that began with a call to shout for joy ends with a quiet, intimate petition: let your love be as real as our hope.

34

Summary: *An acrostic psalm of David, composed when he feigned madness before Abimelech (the superscription's name for Achish king of Gath, 1 Samuel 21:10-15). The psalm is a wisdom-flavored hymn of thanksgiving that moves from personal testimony ('I sought the LORD and He answered me') to communal invitation ('Taste and see that the LORD is good') to didactic instruction ('Come, children, listen to me — I will teach you the fear of the LORD'). Each verse begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet, giving the psalm the feel of an orderly, comprehensive meditation on the goodness of God toward the afflicted.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Verse 9 — ta'amu u-re'u ki tov YHWH ('taste and see that the LORD is good') — is one of the most sensory theological invitations in all of Scripture. The verb ta'am ('to taste') demands physical experience, not intellectual assent. You cannot taste something from a distance; you must take it into your mouth. The psalmist is not arguing that God is good; he is daring the listener to experience God's goodness directly. This is empirical theology: try it and find out. The Christian tradition adopted this verse into eucharistic liturgy, where tasting the bread and wine becomes tasting the goodness of God. But in its original context, the invitation is broader: every experience of divine rescue is a 'tasting' of God's goodness. The acrostic form is itself remarkable — the poet has disciplined an outpouring of gratitude into alphabetic order, as if to say that praise can be both spontaneous and structured, both emotional and orderly.*

Translation Friction: *The superscription refers to 'Abimelech' (Avimelekh), but the biblical narrative in 1 Samuel 21 names the Philistine king as Achish. Abimelech may be a dynastic title for Philistine kings (like 'Pharaoh' for Egyptian rulers), or the superscription may reflect a different tradition. The acrostic is nearly perfect but omits the letter vav (the sixth letter) and adds a pe-verse at the end (v. 23) that falls outside the alphabet, suggesting either textual corruption or deliberate poetic license. Some scholars argue that acrostic psalms are inherently artificial — the alphabetic constraint forces content to fit a formal pattern — but the theological coherence of this psalm argues against dismissing it as mere formal exercise.*

Connections: *Verse 9 ('Taste and see that the LORD is good') is quoted in 1 Peter 2:3 as an invitation to new believers. Verse 15 ('The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous, and His ears toward their cry') and verse 17 ('The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears') are quoted in 1 Peter 3:12. Verse 21 ('He guards all his bones; not one of them is broken') is applied to Jesus in John 19:36, connecting the righteous sufferer of the psalm to the crucified Messiah. The wisdom-teaching section (vv. 12-15) closely parallels Proverbs' instruction format: 'Come, children, listen to me.' The acrostic structure links this psalm to Psalms 25, 37, 111, 112, 119, and 145.*

¹Of David, when he disguised his sanity before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he departed.

²I will bless the LORD at all times.
His praise will always be in my mouth.

³In the LORD my soul will boast.
Let the humble hear and be glad.

⁴and let us exalt His name together.
Magnify the LORD with me,

⁵I sought the LORD, and He answered me
and delivered me from all my terrors.

⁶Those who look to Him are radiant,
and their faces will never be ashamed.

⁷This poor man cried out, and the LORD heard him
and saved him from all his troubles.

⁸The angel of the LORD encamps
around those who fear Him and delivers them.

⁹Taste and see that the LORD is good.
Blessed is the person who takes refuge in Him.

¹⁰Fear the LORD, you His holy ones,
for there is no lack for those who fear Him.

¹¹Young lions may lack and go hungry,
but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

¹²Come, children, listen to me.
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

¹³Who is the person who desires life,
who loves many days and wants to see good?

¹⁴Guard your tongue from evil
and your lips from speaking deceit.

¹⁵Turn away from evil and do good.
Seek peace and pursue it.

¹⁶and His ears are open to their cry.
The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous,

¹⁷The face of the LORD is against those who do evil,
to cut off their memory from the earth.

¹⁸The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears
and delivers them from all their troubles.

¹⁹The LORD is near to the brokenhearted
and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

²⁰but the LORD delivers him out of them all.
Many are the afflictions of the righteous,

²¹He guards all his bones.
Not one of them is broken.

²²Evil will slay the wicked,
and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.

²³The LORD redeems the life of His servants,
and none who take refuge in Him will be condemned.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The phrase *be-shannoto et ta'mo* ('when he changed his discernment/behavior') uses the same root (*ta'am*) that will appear in verse 9 ('taste and see'). The word *ta'am* means both 'taste/discernment' and 'behavior/judgment.' David altered his *ta'am* (pretended to be insane) before Abimelech, and now he invites others to *ta'am* (taste) God's goodness. The wordplay connects the humiliating survival strategy (feigning madness) with the exalted theological conclusion (God is good). The name Abimelech ('my father is king') may be a throne-name for the Philistine king called Achish in 1 Samuel 21.
2. The aleph-verse. The phrase *be-khol et* ('at all times') and *tamid* ('continually, always') together eliminate any exception — there is no circumstance in which praise is inappropriate. David's commitment to bless God is not conditional on God's blessing of David. The word *tehillatov* ('His praise') will become the Hebrew name for the entire book of Psalms: *Tehillim*.
3. The bet-verse. The verb *titballel* ('will boast, will glory') in the *Hitpael* is reflexive-intensive: the soul exults in God as its supreme identity. The *anavim* ('humble, afflicted, poor') are the psalm's primary audience — those who have been brought low by suffering and know they have no resource but God. David's testimony is directed specifically to people who are still in the kind of trouble he just escaped.
4. The gimel-verse. The verb *gaddelu* ('magnify, make great') does not mean making God larger — God cannot be enlarged — but declaring His greatness publicly. The word *yachdav* ('together, in unity') insists that praise is communal. David does not hoard his testimony; he recruits others to join the celebration.
5. The dalet-verse. The verb *darashti* ('I sought') means intensive, purposeful seeking — not a casual prayer but a desperate pursuit. The noun *megurotai* ('my fears, my terrors') from *gur* ('to dread, to be afraid') describes the kind of fear that paralyzes. David was terrified (remember, he was pretending to be insane to avoid execution), and God delivered him from every fear. Not some — all (*mi-kol*).
6. The he-verse. The verb *naharu* ('they were radiant, they beamed, they shone') describes faces lit up from within — the visible transformation that comes from turning toward God. The word is related to *nahar* ('river, stream') and possibly to 'light flowing.' Those who look at God catch His light. The negation *al yechparu* ('their faces will not be shamed/darkened') contrasts radiance with the darkening of shame.
7. The zayin-verse. The demonstrative *zeh* ('this one') is emphatic and personal — David points to himself: this poor man, this particular sufferer, this specific person standing before you. The word *ani* ('poor, afflicted, humble') connects David to the *anavim* of verse 3. Despite being a king, David identifies as one of the afflicted. The testimony is concrete and particular: I cried, God heard, God saved.
8. The chet-verse. The verb *choneh* ('encamps') is a military term — the angel of the LORD sets up a military camp around the faithful, creating a perimeter of divine protection. The image is not of a single guardian angel but of an angelic army establishing a defensive position. The verb *yechaltsem* ('He delivers them, He rescues them') means 'to pull out, to extract from danger' — a rescue operation, not mere comfort.
9. The sensory theology of this verse has had enormous influence. In Christian eucharistic traditions, the verse is read during communion, connecting the physical act of eating bread and wine with the spiritual act of experiencing God's goodness. In its original Hebrew context, the 'tasting' is more broadly experiential — every divine rescue, every answered prayer, every provision is a taste of God's character.
9. The wordplay with *ta'am* from the superscription (v. 1) is essential: David changed his *ta'am* ('discernment/behavior') before Abimelech, and now he invites others to *ta'am* ('taste') God's goodness. What looked like insanity was actually wisdom — and the proof is in the tasting.
10. The yod-verse. The *qedoshav* ('His holy ones, His set-apart ones') are the covenant community — people consecrated to God's service. The promise *ein machsor* ('there is no lack, no want') does not mean wealth but sufficiency. Those who fear God have what they need. The proof follows in verse 11.

11. The kaf-verse. The kefirim ('young lions') are the apex predators of the ancient Near East — the most powerful, the most feared, the most self-sufficient. Even they grow hungry. But those who seek (dorshei) the LORD will not lack kol tov ('any good thing'). The comparison is deliberately provocative: the strongest creature in the wild is less secure than the weakest person who depends on God.
12. The shift from praise to pedagogy is natural in Israelite worship — the temple was a place of both praise and instruction. The phrase yirat YHWH alemmedkhem ('the fear of the LORD I will teach you') treats the fear of God not as a spontaneous emotion but as a learnable skill. It can be taught and acquired, practiced and perfected.
13. The mem-verse. The rhetorical question mi ha-ish ('who is the man?') engages the listener directly — everyone wants life and good days. The phrase ohev yamim lir'ot tov ('loving days to see good') describes the universal human desire for a long and good life. The wisdom teacher's strategy is to begin with what everyone wants and then show the path to it.
14. The nun-verse. The instruction begins with speech — netsor leshonkha me-ra ('guard your tongue from evil'). In wisdom literature, the tongue is the most dangerous part of the body (Proverbs 18:21: 'Death and life are in the power of the tongue'). The word mirmah ('deceit, treachery, fraud') describes speech that misrepresents reality. The fear of the LORD begins with honest speech.
15. The samekh-verse. Four imperatives in rapid succession: sur ('turn away'), aseh ('do'), baqqesh ('seek'), rodefehu ('pursue it'). The progression intensifies: turning from evil is passive avoidance; doing good is active engagement; seeking peace is deliberate effort; pursuing peace (radfat, the same verb used for military pursuit) is aggressive commitment. Peace (shalom) is not something that arrives on its own — it must be hunted down like prey. 1 Peter 3:10-11 quotes verses 13-15 directly.
16. The ayin-verse. God's eyes (einei) and ears (oznav) — the organs of attention — are directed toward the righteous. The preposition el ('toward') suggests movement, not merely position: God leans toward the righteous, inclines in their direction. The shav'atam ('their cry for help') is not formal prayer but the raw cry of distress. God hears unpolished screams as clearly as liturgical prayers.
17. The pe-verse. The same 'face' (penei) that shines on the righteous (Psalm 31:17) is set against (be-) evildoers. The consequence is lehakhrit me-erets zikhram ('to cut off their memory from the earth') — not merely death but the erasure of legacy. In a culture where one's 'name' (memory, reputation, posterity) was the closest thing to immortality, this is the ultimate punishment.
18. The tsade-verse. The structure mirrors verse 7 almost exactly (the poor man cried / the LORD heard / He saved him). The repetition is deliberate: the testimony of one becomes the experience of many. The word mi-kol tsarotam ('from all their troubles') insists on comprehensive deliverance — not partial relief but total rescue.
19. The pairing of nishberei lev ('brokenhearted') and dakke'ei ruach ('crushed in spirit') covers the full interior of the person: lev ('heart') is the center of will and thought; ruach ('spirit') is the animating life-force. Both are broken. And both are the objects of God's nearness. Isaiah 57:15 echoes this verse: God dwells 'with the crushed and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly.'
20. The resh-verse. The psalm does not promise the righteous will avoid trouble — it promises they will be delivered through it. The word rabbot ('many') is honest: afflictions are numerous and persistent. But the counterbalance is mi-kullam ('out of all of them') — God's deliverance is as comprehensive as the suffering is extensive. The theology is not prosperity-gospel optimism but realistic trust: trouble will come, and God will rescue.
21. The shin-verse. The image of guarding bones (shomer kol atsmotav) represents preserving the person's essential structure — bones are the framework that holds a person together. The phrase achat mehennah lo nishbarah ('not one of them is broken') is applied to Jesus in John 19:36 (where the soldiers did not break His legs on the cross). In the psalm's original context, it describes God's protective care for the righteous sufferer — however many afflictions come, the person's core is preserved.
22. The tav-verse. The verb temotet ('will slay, will put to death') describes evil as self-destroying — the wicked person's own evil becomes the executioner. The verb ye'shamu ('will be held guilty, will be condemned, will be desolate') from ashame encompasses both guilt and its consequences. Those who hate the righteous will themselves be found guilty.
23. This extra pe-verse falls outside the acrostic sequence, functioning as a coda or doxological conclusion. The verb podeh ('redeems, ransoms') is the language of buying back a slave or a condemned person — God pays the price to secure the release of His servants. The final promise — ve-lo ye'shemu kol ha-chosim bo ('none who take refuge in Him will be condemned') — closes the psalm with the same verb (chashah, 'to take refuge') that appeared in verse 9. The psalm ends where it began: in the shelter of God's goodness.

35

Summary: *A psalm of David calling on God to fight his enemies — those who repay his kindness with hostility, who bring false accusations, and who gloat over his suffering. The psalm divides into three cycles of complaint and petition (vv. 1-10, 11-18, 19-28), each ending with a vow of praise. David asks God to take up shield and spear, to ambush his persecutors in their own traps, and to vindicate him publicly. It is one of the most vigorous imprecatory psalms in the Psalter.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The psalm's most distinctive feature is the portrait of betrayal in verses 12-14: David's enemies are people he once cared for as intimately as family. When they were sick, he fasted and prayed for them, bowed in mourning as if for a brother or mother. Now those same people celebrate his downfall. This is not a psalm about warfare between strangers but about the specific wound of ingratitude — people who received David's compassion and returned it as cruelty. The military language of verses 1-3 ('take up shield and buckler, draw out the spear') pictures God as a divine warrior entering battle on David's behalf. God is not merely asked to judge but to fight — to become David's champion in a cosmic courtroom that is also a battlefield.*

Translation Friction: *Imprecatory psalms like this one raise difficult questions for readers committed to the ethic of loving enemies. David asks God to confuse, shame, and destroy his persecutors. The request that they fall into their own nets (v. 8) and that ruin overtake them by surprise is not a prayer for justice in an abstract sense but a wish for specific, concrete harm to specific people. Jewish tradition reads these psalms as legitimate cries for divine justice from the powerless; Christian tradition has often struggled with them, sometimes spiritualizing the enemies as demonic forces rather than human beings. The psalm itself makes no such distinction — these are real people who ate at David's table and now plot his destruction.*

Connections: *The divine warrior imagery (vv. 1-3) connects to Exodus 15 (the Song of the Sea), Isaiah 59:17 (God putting on armor), and Ephesians 6:10-17 (the armor of God). The theme of false witnesses (vv. 11, 20-21) connects to Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin (Matthew 26:59-60). The language of being hated without cause (v. 19) is quoted in John 15:25, where Jesus applies it to Himself. The three-cycle structure mirrors Psalm 22, another psalm of the righteous sufferer that moves from complaint to deliverance to praise.*

¹Of David.

Contend, O LORD, with those who contend with me.

Fight against those who fight against me.

²Take up the small shield and the large shield,
and rise to my aid.

³Draw out the spear and close the way
against those who pursue me.
Say to my soul, 'I am your salvation.'

⁴Let those who seek my life be shamed and disgraced.
Let those who plot my ruin
be turned back and humiliated.

⁵Let them be like chaff before the wind,
with the angel of the LORD driving them away.

⁶Let their path be dark and slippery,
with the angel of the LORD pursuing them.

⁷For without cause they hid a net for me in a pit.
Without cause they dug a trap for my life.

⁸Let ruin come upon him by surprise.
Let the net he hid catch him.
Let him fall into his own destruction.

⁹Then my soul will rejoice in the LORD.
It will delight in His salvation.

¹⁰All my bones will say,
'LORD, who is like you —
rescuing the poor from one too strong for him,
the poor and needy from the one who robs him?'

¹¹Violent witnesses rise up.
They ask me about things I know nothing of.

¹²They repay me evil for good —
bereavement for my soul.

¹³But when they were sick, I wore sackcloth.
I humbled myself with fasting,
and my prayer returned to my own chest.

¹⁴I went about as though grieving for a friend, for a brother.
I bowed low in mourning, as one who weeps for his mother.

¹⁵But when I stumbled, they gathered in glee.
Strikers assembled against me — people I did not know.
They tore at me without ceasing.

¹⁶Like godless mockers at a feast,
they gnash their teeth at me.

¹⁷O Lord, how long will you look on?
Rescue my life from their destruction,
my precious life from the lions.

¹⁸I will thank you in the great assembly.
Among a mighty throng I will praise you.

¹⁹Do not let my enemies gloat over me — those who are false.
Do not let those who hate me without cause
wink at each other in malice.

²⁰For they do not speak peace.
Against the quiet ones of the land
they devise words of deceit.

²¹They open their mouths wide against me and say,
'Ha! Ha! Our eyes have seen it!'

²²You have seen this, O LORD — do not be silent.
O Lord, do not be far from me.

²³Rouse yourself! Wake up for my vindication,
my God and my Lord, for my cause!

²⁴Vindicate me according to your righteousness,
O LORD my God,
and do not let them gloat over me.

²⁵Do not let them say in their hearts, 'Ha! Just what we wanted!'
Do not let them say, 'We have swallowed him up!'

²⁶Let them be ashamed and humiliated together —
those who rejoice at my distress.
Let them be clothed in shame and disgrace —
those who exalt themselves against me.

²⁷Let those who delight in my vindication
shout for joy and be glad.
Let them say continually,
'Great is the LORD, who delights in the well-being of His servant!'

²⁸Then my tongue will speak of your righteousness
and your praise all day long.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The opening uses two pairs of cognate verbs: *rivah/yerivai* ('contend/those who contend') and *lecham/lochamai* ('fight/those who fight'). The first pair is legal language — courtroom combat; the second is military language — battlefield combat. David asks God to enter both arenas on his behalf. The repetition creates an aggressive, urgent tone from the first breath.
2. Two types of shields: *magen* (a small, round shield for hand-to-hand combat) and *tsinnah* (a large, full-body shield that could protect an entire soldier). Together they represent complete defensive coverage. The verb *qumah* ('rise up, stand up') is a battle cry — God is called to His feet as a warrior preparing for combat.
3. The juxtaposition of military imagery (spears, shields) and personal intimacy ('say to my soul') is characteristic of David's prayer life. He is simultaneously a warrior requesting backup and a child requesting comfort. The phrase *yeshu'atekh ani* ('I am your salvation') may be the most personal statement God can make to a human being — salvation is not a thing God provides but a relationship God is.
4. Four verbs of defeat in a single verse: *yevoshu* ('let them be ashamed'), *yikkalemu* ('let them be disgraced'), *yissogu achor* ('let them be turned back'), *yachperu* ('let them be humiliated'). The escalation from shame to retreat to humiliation describes a complete rout. The phrase *mevaqshei nafshi* ('those who seek my life') means people actively trying to kill him.
5. The simile of chaff (*mots*) before wind (*ruach*) pictures enemies as weightless, substanceless, blown away without resistance. The angel of the LORD (*malakh YHWH*) appears as the active agent of pursuit — the same figure who encamps around the faithful in Psalm 34:8 now chases the wicked. The verb *docheh* ('pushing, driving, thrusting') is aggressive: the angel does not merely observe the scattering but actively propels it.
6. The combination of *choshekh* ('darkness') and *chalaqlaqot* ('slippery places') creates a nightmare landscape: the enemies cannot see where they are going and cannot keep their footing. The angel of the LORD pursues from behind while the terrain itself conspires against them. The verb *rodefam* ('pursuing them') uses the same root that described David's pursuers in verse 3 — the hunters become the hunted.
7. The word *chinnam* ('without cause, for nothing, gratuitously') appears twice, emphasizing the gratuity of the attack. David has done nothing to provoke this — the hostility is unprovoked. The combination of *reshet* ('net') and *shachat* ('pit') describes a double trap: a pit dug in the path and a net stretched over it. Jesus quotes the phrase 'without cause' in John 15:25 to describe the hatred directed at Him.

8. The poetic justice is precise: the sho'ah ('ruin, devastation') that was planned for David falls on the planner instead. The net the enemy hid becomes the net that catches him. The pit he dug becomes the pit he falls into. This is the lex talionis applied to treachery — the weapon backfires on the one who deployed it. The singular pronoun ('him') may target a specific ringleader among David's enemies.
9. The first cycle closes with a vow of praise. The verbs tagil ('will rejoice, will exult') and tasis ('will delight, will be glad') describe intense, exuberant joy. The shift from imprecation to celebration is abrupt but characteristic of the Psalter's emotional range: the same voice that calls for the enemy's destruction breaks into joy at the prospect of God's vindication.
10. The phrase kol atsmotai ('all my bones') means the praise comes from the body's very structure — every bone vibrates with gratitude. The rhetorical question mi khamokha ('who is like you?') echoes the Song of the Sea (Exodus 15:11) and is one of the Hebrew Bible's most exalted expressions of God's uniqueness. The repetition of ani ('poor, afflicted') and the addition of evyon ('destitute, needy') emphasize David's self-identification with the powerless.
11. The second cycle begins with edei chamas ('witnesses of violence'), a phrase that means both 'violent witnesses' and 'witnesses who testify about violence.' They accuse David of things he has no knowledge of (asher lo yadati, 'which I did not know'). The verb yish'aluni ('they question me, they demand of me') suggests an interrogation — David is cross-examined about crimes he never committed.
12. The phrase ra'ah tachat tovah ('evil instead of good') describes the specific injustice of ingratitude. The word shekhol ('bereavement, childlessness') is one of the most devastating words in Hebrew — it describes the grief of a parent who has lost a child. David says their betrayal has left his soul bereaved, as though something precious has died.
13. The phrase al cheqi tashuv ('returned to my chest') remains one of the more enigmatic expressions in the Psalter. The cheq ('bosom, chest, lap') is a place of intimacy. Some read it as: 'my prayer came back to rest in my own heart' (i.e., the prayer was so deeply felt it became part of him). Others: 'my prayer was returned unanswered' (i.e., God did not grant the healing David sought). The ambiguity may be intentional.
14. David treated their suffering as if it were the suffering of his closest relations: re'a ('friend, companion'), ach ('brother'), em ('mother'). The word qoder ('darkened, gloomy') describes the downcast posture of genuine mourning — head bowed, face darkened with grief. The comparison to mourning one's mother is the deepest possible grief-image in the ancient world. David's compassion was not performative but authentic — and that is what makes the betrayal so devastating.
15. The contrast with verses 13-14 is devastating. David mourned for them; they celebrate his fall. The verb samchu ('they rejoiced') at his tsal'i ('my stumbling, my limping') describes the specific cruelty of schadenfreude. The nekhim ('strikers, smiters') are either hired thugs or people who attacked David verbally. The phrase lo yadati ('I did not know') may mean 'people I did not recognize' or 'without my knowing' — the attack came from unexpected quarters.
16. The phrase chanfei la'agei ma'og ('godless ones among mockers of cake/feast') is textually difficult. The word ma'og may mean 'cake' (i.e., party-goers mocking for the price of a meal) or may be corrupt. The image is clear enough: people who mock David for entertainment, grinding their teeth in hostility (charoq shinneimo, 'gnashing their teeth').
17. The address shifts to Adonai ('Lord, Master'). The question kammah tir'eh ('how long will you look on?') accuses God of being a spectator rather than a participant — God is watching the violence without intervening. The word yechidati ('my only one, my precious one, my darling') is an extraordinary term for the soul — it means 'my unique one, the only one I have.' David has only one life, and the lions (kefirim, here metaphorical for predatory enemies) are about to take it.
18. The second cycle closes with a vow of public praise. The qahal rav ('great assembly') and am atsum ('mighty people/throng') describe the largest possible audience. David's praise will be as public as his suffering. The shift from 'rescue me' to 'I will praise you' assumes the rescue will come — the vow of praise is an act of faith made before deliverance arrives.
19. The third cycle opens. The enemies are described as oyvai sheqer ('my enemies of falsehood') — their enmity is based on lies. The phrase sone'ai chinnam ('those who hate me without cause') is quoted by Jesus in John 15:25 to describe the world's hostility toward Him. The verb yiqretsu ayin ('they wink the eye') describes a conspiratorial gesture — a knowing glance exchanged between co-conspirators, silent communication that excludes and threatens the target.
20. The rigei erets ('quiet ones of the land') are the peaceful, unassuming people who live without aggression — and precisely these people are targeted by the deceivers. The phrase divrei mirmot ('words of deceit, treacherous words') describes speech weaponized: language designed to trap, mislead, and destroy the unsuspecting.
21. The gloating cry he'ach he'ach ('Aha! Aha!') is an exclamation of malicious satisfaction — the sound of people watching someone they despise finally fall. The phrase ra'atah einenu ('our eye has seen it') means 'we witnessed your downfall with our own eyes.' The wide-open mouth (vayarchivu pihem) combines shouting, mocking, and the predatory posture of an animal about to devour.
22. David turns the enemies' boast back on them: they said 'our eyes have seen it' (v. 21), but David replies ra'itah YHWH ('you have seen, O LORD'). God is the true witness, and His seeing must lead to action, not silence (al techerash, 'do not be deaf/silent'). The plea al tirchaq ('do not be far away') reveals David's deepest fear: not the enemies, but God's absence.
23. The verbs ha'irah ('rouse yourself, stir') and haqitsah ('wake up') are astonishingly bold — David tells God to wake from apparent sleep. This is not irreverence but the urgency of the desperate. Psalm 44:23 makes the same plea: 'Wake up! Why are you sleeping, O Lord?' The double title Elohai va-Adonai ('my God and my Lord') combines the universal divine name with the personal title of authority.

24. The verb *shofeteni* ('judge me, vindicate me') appeals to God as the supreme court. The standard of judgment is *ke-tsidqekha* ('according to your righteousness') — not David's merit but God's character. David is confident enough in his innocence in this matter to submit to God's righteous judgment. The plea *al yismchu li* ('do not let them rejoice over me') is the refrain of the psalm: the nightmare scenario is the enemies celebrating.
25. The phrase *he'ach nafshenu* ('Aha, our desire!' or 'Aha, just what our soul craved!') reveals the enemies' motive: they wanted David's destruction for its own sake. The verb *billa'anuhu* ('we have swallowed him up') pictures complete annihilation — consumed, digested, gone.
26. The clothing metaphor — *yilbeshu boshet u-khelimmah* ('let them wear shame and disgrace') — pictures shame as a visible garment. Everyone will see their humiliation. The verb *hamagdilim* ('those who magnify themselves, those who act arrogantly') describes people who make themselves look big at David's expense.
27. The focus shifts to David's supporters — those who *chafetsei tsidqi* ('delight in my righteousness/vindication'). Their perpetual song (*tamid*, 'continually, always') is *yigdal YHWH* ('let the LORD be magnified/great'). The final phrase *hechafets shelom avdo* ('who delights in the peace/wholeness/well-being of His servant') reveals something about God's character: God takes pleasure in His servant's *shalom*. David's well-being is not merely tolerated by God but desired.
28. The psalm closes with David's personal vow. The verb *tehgeh* ('will meditate, will murmur, will speak') describes the low, continuous sound of someone rehearsing truth — the tongue will not stop speaking God's righteousness (*tsidqekha*) and praise (*tehillatekha*). The phrase *kol hayyom* ('all the day') matches the opening scope of psalms like 34:2 ('His praise will always be in my mouth'). The third cycle, like the first two, ends in praise.

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Summary: *A psalm of David that moves between two extremes: the psychology of the wicked (vv. 2-5) and the cosmic dimensions of God's faithful love (vv. 6-10), concluding with a prayer for continued protection (vv. 11-13). The opening oracle describes the inner monologue of the wicked person — someone who has flattered himself out of any awareness of sin, whose words are all deceit and whose plans are all harm. Against this portrait of human corruption, the psalm sets the immensity of God's chesed, tsedaqah, and mishpat, which reach to the heavens, the clouds, and the great mountains. The contrast between the small, self-deceived wickedness of humanity and the vast, overflowing goodness of God is the psalm's organizing energy.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Verses 6-10 contain one of the most expansive descriptions of God's attributes in the Psalter. The faithful love (chesed) reaches the heavens; the faithfulness (emunah) reaches the clouds; the righteousness (tsedaqah) is like the great mountains; the justice (mishpat) is like the deep ocean. Each attribute is paired with a cosmic comparison, as if the psalmist is saying: these qualities are not merely large — they are the size of creation itself. Then verse 10 introduces one of the most beautiful images in the Hebrew Bible: 'In your light we see light' (be-orkha nireh or). Light is the medium of vision, but this verse says that God's light is the medium through which all other light becomes visible. We cannot see without God's illumination. Knowledge, truth, beauty — everything we perceive clearly — is perceived through the light God provides.*

Translation Friction: *The opening line (v. 2) is textually difficult. The Hebrew reads *ne'um pesha la-rasha be-qerev libbi*, which literally translates 'oracle of transgression to the wicked in the midst of my heart.' The phrase 'in the midst of my heart' is puzzling — whose heart? Some emend *libbi* ('my heart') to *libbo* ('his heart'), making it 'transgression speaks to the wicked within his own heart.' Others retain the first person and read it as the psalmist receiving an oracle about wickedness within his own perception. The word *ne'um* ('oracle, utterance') is normally used for divine speech (*ne'um YHWH*, 'oracle of the LORD'), so applying it to transgression personified is deliberately jarring — sin speaks with prophetic authority to the wicked.*

Connections: *Paul quotes verse 2 in Romans 3:18 ('there is no fear of God before their eyes') as part of his catena of Old Testament texts proving universal human sinfulness. The cosmic descriptions of God's attributes (vv. 6-8) anticipate the creation theology of Psalms 104 and 148. The phrase 'fountain of life' (*meqor chayyim*, v. 10) connects to Proverbs 10:11, 13:14, 14:27, and Jeremiah 2:13 (where God is 'the fountain of living waters'). The image of taking refuge 'in the shadow of your wings' (v. 8) appears in Psalms 17:8, 57:1, 61:4, 63:7, and 91:4, and is echoed in Jesus' lament over Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37).*

‡For the director of music. Of David, the servant of the LORD.

²Transgression speaks an oracle to the wicked
deep within his heart:
'There is no fear of God before his eyes.'

³For he flatters himself in his own eyes,
too much to detect his iniquity and hate it.

⁴The words of his mouth are harm and deceit.
He has ceased to act wisely or do good.

⁵He plots harm on his bed.
He stations himself on a path that is not good.
He does not reject evil.

⁶O LORD, your faithful love reaches to the heavens.
Your faithfulness extends to the skies.

⁷Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains.
Your justice is like the great deep.
You save both people and animals, O LORD.

⁸How precious is your faithful love, O God!
The children of humanity take refuge
in the shadow of your wings.

⁹They feast on the abundance of your house,
and you give them drink from the river of your delights.

¹⁰For with you is the fountain of life.
In your light we see light.

¹¹Extend your faithful love to those who know you,
and your righteousness to the upright in heart.

¹²Let not the foot of pride come against me,
nor the hand of the wicked drive me away.

¹³There the evildoers have fallen —
thrown down, unable to rise.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The title eved YHWH ('servant of the LORD') is rare in psalm superscriptions — it appears only here and in Psalm 18:1. The title carries enormous weight in the Hebrew Bible: Moses, Joshua, and the prophets are called 'servants of the LORD.' It identifies David not merely as a king who writes poetry but as one who has a designated role in God's service.
2. The textual issue of libbi ('my heart') versus libbo ('his heart') affects interpretation significantly. If 'my heart,' the psalmist is reporting an oracle he received about the nature of wickedness. If 'his heart,' the oracle of transgression operates within the wicked person's own interior. Most modern translations follow the emendation to libbo, which makes smoother sense. We follow this reading.
2. Paul quotes ein pachad Elohim le-neged einav in Romans 3:18 as the climactic verse in his argument that all humanity is under sin. The absence of the fear of God is not one sin among many but the root condition from which all sins grow.
3. The verb hecheliq ('he made smooth, he flattered') means the wicked person has polished his self-image until it reflects no flaws. The result is the inability limtso avono lisno ('to find his iniquity so as to hate it'). Self-flattery destroys moral perception: you cannot repent of what you cannot see. The avon ('iniquity') is present but invisible — hidden under the smooth surface of self-deception.

4. The trajectory of wickedness: self-flattery (v. 3) leads to destructive speech (v. 4a) and then to the abandonment of wisdom and goodness (v. 4b). The verb *chadal* ('to cease, to stop, to desist') means this person once knew how to be wise and good but deliberately stopped. Wickedness here is not ignorance but apostasy — turning away from what was known.
5. The bedroom becomes a war room: *al mishkavo* ('on his bed') — the place of rest becomes the place of scheming. The verb *yityatsev* ('he stations himself, he takes his stand') is the military verb from Psalm 2:2 — the wicked person deliberately positions himself on a wrong road. The final phrase *ra lo yim'as* ('evil he does not reject') completes the portrait: this person has lost the capacity for moral discrimination. Evil no longer repulses him.
6. The four cosmic comparisons in verses 6–7 (heavens, clouds, great mountains, deep ocean) form an ascending-descending pattern: up to the heavens, up to the clouds, down to the mountain roots, down to the ocean deep. God's attributes fill the entire vertical axis of creation, from the highest point to the lowest depth.
7. The phrase *ke-harrerei El* ('like the mountains of God') uses *El* either as a divine name ('mountains of God') or as a superlative ('mighty mountains, enormous mountains'). Either way, God's *tsedaqah* is as massive and immovable as mountain ranges. His *mishpatim* ('judgments, justice') are *tehom rabbah* ('the great deep') — unfathomable, ocean-deep, beyond human measurement. The final line expands God's care beyond humanity: *adam u-vehemah toshia YHWH* ('you save both humanity and animals, O LORD'). God's saving concern extends to all living creatures.
8. The exclamation *mah yaqqar chasdekha* ('how precious/costly/rare is your faithful love!') uses *yaqqar*, a word for things of supreme value — precious stones, rare treasures. God's *chesed* is not common; it is the most valuable thing in existence. The image *be-tsel kenafekha* ('in the shadow of your wings') pictures God as a bird sheltering its young — the same image Jesus uses in Matthew 23:37 ('as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings'). The verb *yechesayun* ('they take refuge') from *chasah* is the psalm's thematic verb.
9. The word *adanekha* ('your delights') is linguistically related to Eden, and the *nachal* ('stream, wadi, river') flowing through God's house evokes the river that watered the garden in Genesis 2:10. The psalm is describing not merely divine hospitality but a return to the original paradise — God's presence is the garden, and those who shelter there drink from its river.
10. The phrase *meqor chayyim* ('fountain of life') appears in Proverbs 10:11, 13:14, 14:27 — always describing a source of vitality that keeps flowing. Jeremiah 2:13 uses the same image negatively: Israel has abandoned 'the fountain of living waters' (*meqor mayim chayyim*) for broken cisterns. The psalm locates this fountain in God's own presence (*immekha*, 'with you').
10. The phrase *be-orkha nireh or* ('in your light we see light') was adopted as the motto of Columbia University (*In lumine tuo videbimus lumen*) and has been a central text in Christian theology of knowledge. Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin all built on it. In its original Hebrew context, it affirms that all genuine perception of reality depends on divine illumination.
11. The verb *meshokh* ('draw out, extend, continue, prolong') asks God to keep the flow of *chesed* going — do not cut it off, do not withdraw it. The recipients are *le-yod'ekha* ('to those who know you') — not merely those who know about God but those who know God in the relational, intimate sense that *yada* carries in Hebrew. The parallel *le-yishrei lev* ('to the upright in heart') defines knowledge of God in moral terms: to know God is to have an upright heart.
12. The 'foot of pride' (*regel ga'avah*) is a conquering foot — the victor's foot on the neck of the defeated. The 'hand of the wicked' (*yad resha'im*) is the hand that seizes and displaces. Both images describe forcible removal from one's place — eviction by arrogant power. David asks to be kept in the shelter described in verses 8–10, safe from the proud and the wicked.
13. The word *sham* ('there') points to a specific scene — perhaps a future judgment, perhaps a battlefield, perhaps the place where the wicked's plans collapse. The finality is total: *dochu* ('they are thrust down, pushed over') and *lo yakhlu qum* ('they are unable to rise'). The psalm ends not with a cry of vengeance but with a prophetic declaration: the wicked will fall, and their fall will be permanent. The brevity of the verse — six Hebrew words — gives it the force of a verdict.

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Summary: An acrostic wisdom psalm of David, each strophe beginning with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The psalm is a sustained meditation on the problem of the wicked prospering and the righteous suffering — a problem addressed not with philosophical argument but with repeated commands to trust, wait, and refrain from envy. David's answer to the success of the wicked is not that it is an illusion but that it is temporary. The land (erets) is the central promise: the wicked will be cut off from it, and the righteous will inherit it. The psalm moves through twenty-two strophes like a parent patiently counseling a child who cannot understand why the bully gets what he wants.

What Makes This Remarkable: The word erets ('land, earth') appears seven times in this psalm — the number of completeness — and each occurrence reinforces the same promise: the meek, the righteous, the faithful will inherit the land, while the wicked will be excised from it. Jesus' beatitude 'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth' (Matthew 5:5) is a direct quotation of verse 11. The acrostic form is itself

significant: the alphabet is the totality of language, and by working through every letter, David is saying that this truth covers everything — from aleph to tav, there is nothing to add. The psalm's emotional texture is distinctive in the Psalter. It does not rage against injustice or weep over suffering. Instead, it counsels patience with the calm authority of someone who has watched enough cycles to know how they end. The repeated *al titchar* ('do not fret, do not burn with anger') is addressed to the believer's nervous system, not just his theology.

Translation Friction: *The psalm's theology of retribution — the wicked will be destroyed, the righteous will prosper — is precisely the theology that Job challenges and Ecclesiastes questions. Read in isolation, Psalm 37 can sound like naïve optimism: just wait, and everything will work out. But the psalm's perspective is not naïve — it is the long view. David explicitly acknowledges the prosperity of the wicked (vv. 7, 16, 35) and does not deny it. His argument is about duration, not appearance: 'I have seen the wicked in great power, spreading like a native green tree. Yet he passed away, and he was no more' (vv. 35-36). The Hebrew word for 'land' (erets) may refer to the specific land of Israel (covenant inheritance) or to the earth broadly. In its original context, the promise is likely about land-tenure in Israel; in Jesus' usage, it is universalized.*

Connections: *The beatitude 'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth' (Matthew 5:5) directly quotes verse 11. The psalm's theology of the righteous inheriting the land connects to the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 12:7, 13:15, 15:18) and the Deuteronomic blessings (Deuteronomy 28). Proverbs 24:19 ('Do not fret because of evildoers') echoes the psalm's opening. The acrostic structure links this psalm to Psalms 9-10, 25, 34, 111, 112, 119, and 145. The observation that the righteous are never forsaken and their children never beg bread (v. 25) became a test case in later theological reflection on suffering and poverty.*

¹Of David.

Do not burn with anger over evildoers.
Do not envy those who do wrong.

²For like grass they will quickly wither,
and like green plants they will fade away.

³Trust in the LORD and do good.
Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness.

⁴Delight yourself in the LORD,
and He will give you the desires of your heart.

⁵Roll your way onto the LORD.
Trust in Him, and He will act.

⁶He will bring forth your righteousness like the light,
and your justice like the noonday sun.

⁷Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for Him.
Do not burn with anger over the one whose way prospers,
over the person who carries out schemes.

⁸Release anger and abandon rage.
Do not fret — it leads only to harm.

⁹For evildoers will be cut off,
but those who wait for the LORD will inherit the land.

- ¹⁰A little while, and the wicked will be no more.
You will look carefully at his place — and he will be gone.
- ¹¹But the meek will inherit the land
and delight in abundant peace.
- ¹²The wicked person plots against the righteous
and gnashes his teeth at him.
- ¹³The Lord laughs at him,
for He sees that his day is coming.
- ¹⁴The wicked draw the sword and bend the bow
to bring down the poor and needy,
to slaughter those whose way is upright.
- ¹⁵Their sword will pierce their own heart,
and their bows will be broken.
- ¹⁶Better is the little that the righteous has
than the abundance of many wicked.
- ¹⁷For the arms of the wicked will be broken,
but the LORD upholds the righteous.
- ¹⁸The LORD knows the days of the blameless,
and their inheritance will last forever.
- ¹⁹They will not be put to shame in evil times,
and in days of famine they will be satisfied.
- ²⁰But the wicked will perish.
The enemies of the LORD will vanish like the beauty of the meadows —
they will vanish into smoke.
- ²¹The wicked borrows and does not repay,
but the righteous is generous and gives.
- ²²For those blessed by Him will inherit the land,
but those cursed by Him will be cut off.
- ²³The steps of a person are established by the LORD,
and He delights in his way.
- ²⁴Though he stumble, he will not fall headlong,
for the LORD holds his hand.
- ²⁵I was young and now I am old,
yet I have not seen the righteous abandoned
or his children begging for bread.

²⁶All day long he is gracious and lends,
and his children become a blessing.

²⁷Turn from evil and do good,
and you will dwell in the land forever.

²⁸For the LORD loves justice
and does not abandon His faithful ones.
They are preserved forever,
but the offspring of the wicked will be cut off.

²⁹The righteous will inherit the land
and dwell in it forever.

³⁰The mouth of the righteous murmurs wisdom,
and his tongue speaks justice.

³¹The instruction of his God is in his heart.
His steps do not slip.

³²The wicked watches the righteous
and seeks to kill him.

³³The LORD will not abandon him to his hand,
nor let him be condemned when he is brought to trial.

³⁴Wait for the LORD and keep His way.
He will raise you up to inherit the land.
When the wicked are cut off, you will see it.

³⁵I have seen the wicked, ruthless and powerful,
spreading himself like a flourishing native tree.

³⁶But he passed away — and suddenly he was gone.
I looked for him, but he could not be found.

³⁷Watch the blameless person and observe the upright,
for there is a future for the person of peace.

³⁸But transgressors will be destroyed together.
The future of the wicked is cut off.

³⁹The salvation of the righteous comes from the LORD.
He is their refuge in time of trouble.

⁴⁰The LORD helps them and delivers them.
He delivers them from the wicked and saves them,
because they take refuge in Him.

1. The aleph-strophe. The verb *al titchar* ('do not fret, do not be heated, do not burn') from *charah* ('to burn, to be kindled') addresses the visceral, heat-generating frustration that rises when the wicked prosper. The parallel verb *al teqanne* ('do not envy') from *qana* ('to be jealous, to be zealous') addresses the desire to have what the wicked have. Together they name the two emotional responses the psalm will spend forty verses treating: rage and envy.
2. The reason not to envy: the wicked are *ke-chatsir* ('like grass') — the most fragile, temporary form of life in the Near East. After the spring rains, grass covers the hillsides in green. When the summer heat arrives, it vanishes in days. The verb *yimmalu* ('they will wither, they will be cut') and *yibbolun* ('they will wilt, they will fade') describe the inevitable trajectory of grass: rapid growth, rapid death.
3. The bet-strophe. Four imperatives: *betach* ('trust'), *aseh tov* ('do good'), *shekhan erets* ('dwell in the land'), *re'eh emunah* ('cultivate/feed on faithfulness'). The last phrase is debated — *re'eh* can mean 'feed, shepherd, cultivate' and *emunah* can mean 'faithfulness, reliability, security.' The instruction is practical: do not flee the land because the wicked seem to own it. Stay, trust, do good, and feed on faithfulness like a flock feeds on pasture.
4. The promise of verse 4 has been both a comfort and a stumbling block. Read transactionally, it says: if you delight in God, He will give you what you want. Read formatively, it says: delighting in God transforms what you want, so that what God gives is always what your transformed heart desires. The psalm's overall theology of trust and patience supports the formative reading.
5. The gimel-strophe. The verb *gol* ('roll') from *galal* is physical — you roll a burden off your own back onto God's. The *darkekha* ('your way, your path, your course of life') is everything: plans, anxieties, outcomes. The promise *ve-hu ya'aseh* ('and He — He will do it, He will act') is deliberately open-ended. It does not specify what God will do. It simply guarantees that God will act. The emphasis falls on the pronoun *hu* ('He') — you are not alone in this.
6. The vindication image: *tsidqekha* ('your righteousness') will be displayed *ka-or* ('like the light') — visible, undeniable, radiant. The *mishpatekha* ('your justice, your just cause') will be like *ha-tsohorayim* ('the noonday, the double-brightness') — the moment of maximum visibility when no shadow remains. The righteous person's cause, now hidden under the wicked's prosperity, will eventually be displayed in full daylight.
7. The dalet-strophe. The verb *dom* ('be still, be silent, be motionless') demands cessation of anxious activity. The verb *hitcholel* ('wait, writhe in patience') from *chul* ('to writhe, to wait in travail') suggests that patience is not passive but effortful — it costs something to wait. The *al titchar* ('do not fret') from verse 1 returns, now specified: do not fret over the person whose schemes actually succeed (*matsliach darkko*, 'his way prospers'). David acknowledges that evil plans sometimes work.
8. The he-strophe. Three imperatives address the anger cycle: *heref me-af* ('let go of anger'), *azov chemah* ('abandon fury/rage'), *al titchar* ('do not fret'). The final phrase *akh lehare'a* ('it only leads to doing evil') reveals the danger: righteous indignation, if nursed into obsession, becomes its own form of evil. Fretting about injustice can make you unjust.
9. The vav-strophe. The verb *yikkaretun* ('they will be cut off') is covenant-curse language — excision from the community, from the land, from life. The verb *yirshu erets* ('they will inherit/possess the land') is covenant-blessing language — permanent tenure in the promised inheritance. The *erets* ('land/earth') is the psalm's key word: who gets to stay in the land? Not the aggressive, not the schemers, but the *qovei YHWH* ('those who wait/hope for the LORD').
10. The zayin-strophe. The phrase *od me'at* ('yet a little while') is the psalm's temporal key: the wicked person's prosperity has an expiration date. The verb *hitbonanta* ('you will look carefully, you will examine closely') means a deliberate inspection of the place (*maqom*) where the wicked once stood. You will search for him and find nothing. The disappearance is total: *ve-einennu* ('and he is not, and he is gone').
11. The anavim are the central characters of the Psalter's social vision: the poor, the afflicted, the humble — people who lack power and know they lack it. Their inheritance of the land (*erets*) reverses the normal power structure: the powerful seize land, but the meek receive it from God. Jesus' quotation universalizes the promise from 'the land' (of Israel) to 'the earth' (the entire world).
12. The chet-strophe. The verb *zomem* ('plots, devises, schemes') describes calculated, premeditated hostility. The verb *choreq shinnav* ('gnashes his teeth') is an expression of animal rage — baring teeth like a predator. The combination of cold calculation and hot rage describes the specific psychology of the wicked toward the righteous: it is both strategic and visceral.
13. God's response to the wicked person's scheming is laughter (*vischaq*, from *tsachaq*, 'to laugh'). This is the same divine laughter as Psalm 2:4 — not amusement but supreme confidence. God laughs because He sees (*ra'ah*) what the wicked cannot: *yomo* ('his day') — the appointed day of reckoning. The wicked plots in time; God sees the end of time.
14. The tet-strophe. The weapons — *cherev* ('sword') and *qeshet* ('bow') — represent close combat and ranged warfare. The targets — *ani ve-evyon* ('poor and needy') and *yishrei derekh* ('upright in way/conduct') — are people who cannot fight back. The verb *litvoach* ('to slaughter') is butchery language, used for slaughtering animals. The wicked treat the righteous poor as livestock.
15. The poetic justice is exact: the sword drawn against the poor enters the wicked person's own heart (*be-libbam*). The bows bent against the needy are snapped (*tishavarnah*, 'they will be broken'). The weapons turn on their users. This is the psalm's consistent vision: the violence of the wicked is self-defeating.
16. The yod-strophe. The *tov...min* ('better...than') formula is classic wisdom speech (cf. Proverbs 15:16, 16:8). The comparison is not between equal quantities but between qualities: a small amount possessed by a righteous person has more real value (stability, blessing, permanence) than the *hamon* ('abundance, tumult, wealth') of many wicked people combined.

17. The kaf-strophe. The zero'ot ('arms') represent power and agency — what the wicked can do. These will be broken (tishavarnah). The contrast: ve-somekh tsaddiqim YHWH ('but the LORD supports/upholds the righteous'). The verb somekh ('supports, sustains, upholds') pictures a hand placed under something to keep it from falling. The wicked lose their power; the righteous are held up by God's hand.
18. The lamed-strophe. The verb yodea ('knows') means intimate, comprehensive knowledge — God knows every day (yemei) of the blameless person's life. Their nachalatam ('their inheritance') will be le-olam ('forever'). The contrast with the wicked, whose prosperity is temporary as grass, is total: the righteous person's inheritance has no expiration date.
19. The promise addresses the two great fears: public shame (lo yevoshu) and physical want (yisba'u, 'they will be full/satisfied'). The be-et ra'ah ('in the time of evil/disaster') and bi-yemei re'avon ('in the days of famine') are the worst-case scenarios. Even then, the blameless will not be humiliated and will not go hungry.
20. The mem-strophe. The phrase ki-yqar karim ('like the glory/beauty of meadows' or 'like the fat of lambs') is textually uncertain. If 'meadows,' the image is of green pastureland that dries up and becomes fuel for fire. If 'fat of lambs,' the image is of sacrificial fat consumed on the altar. Both readings end the same way: be-ashan kalu ('in smoke they are consumed'). The wicked dissolve into nothing.
21. The nun-strophe. The economic contrast is sharp: the wicked person takes and does not return; the righteous person gives freely. The verb chonen ('is gracious, shows favor, gives generously') from chanan describes giving motivated not by obligation but by kindness. The righteous person's relationship to resources mirrors God's own generosity.
22. The samekh-strophe. The erets ('land') promise returns, now framed in terms of divine blessing and cursing. The mevorakav ('those blessed by Him') and mequllaluv ('those cursed by Him') echo the Deuteronomic blessing-curse framework (Deuteronomy 28). Inheritance of the land is the visible sign of divine favor; being cut off from it is the visible sign of divine judgment.
23. The ayin-strophe. The phrase me-YHWH mits'adei gever konnanu ('from the LORD the steps of a man are established') means God directs the specific movements of the person who trusts Him — not just the destination but each step along the way. The phrase ve-darkko yechpats ('and in his way He delights') is remarkable: God takes pleasure in the righteous person's path. The faithful walker is not merely tolerated but enjoyed.
24. The promise is not that the righteous will never stumble (ki yippol, 'when/though he falls') but that he will not be utterly destroyed (lo yutal, 'he will not be thrown down completely'). The reason: YHWH somekh yado ('the LORD supports/holds his hand'). The image is of a parent holding a child's hand as the child learns to walk — stumbles happen, but the hand prevents catastrophic falls.
25. The pe-strophe. David speaks from the full arc of a lifetime: na'ar hayiti ('I was young') gam zaqanti ('I have also grown old'). His testimony is empirical: in all those years of observation, lo ra'iti tsaddiq ne'ezav ('I have not seen the righteous forsaken'). This verse has been a source of comfort and also of theological difficulty — what about righteous people who are, in fact, abandoned and impoverished? The psalm's perspective is proverbial, not universal: it describes the general pattern of God's faithfulness, not an exception-free law.
26. The righteous person's generosity is habitual: kol hayyom ('all day long') he chonen u-malveh ('is gracious and lends'). The result extends to the next generation: ve-zar'o li-verakhah ('and his offspring become a blessing'). Generosity is not only moral but generative — it produces blessing that flows to the next generation.
27. The tsade-strophe repeats the instruction of Psalm 34:15 (sur me-ra va-aseh tov, 'turn from evil and do good') and adds the land-promise: u-shkhon le-olam ('and dwell forever'). The moral instruction and the inheritance promise are inseparable: doing good is the path to permanent habitation.
28. The qoph-strophe. God's love of mishpat ('justice') grounds the entire psalm: because God loves justice, He preserves the righteous and cuts off the wicked. The chasidav ('His faithful ones') are those bound to God by chesed. The permanence markers le-olam nishmaru ('forever they are guarded') contrast with the cutting-off of the wicked's offspring.
29. The resh-strophe restates the psalm's central promise with maximum simplicity: tsaddiqim yirshu erets ('the righteous will inherit the land'). The verb yishkenu ('they will dwell') and the duration la-ad ('forever, in perpetuity') settle the matter: the land belongs to the righteous, and their tenure has no end.
30. The shin-strophe. The verb yehgeh ('murmurs, meditates, speaks in low tones') is the same verb used in Psalm 1:2 for meditating on Torah. The righteous person's speech flows from deep meditation: wisdom (chokhmah) and justice (mishpat) emerge naturally from a mind saturated in God's instruction.
31. The tav-strophe. The torat Elohav ('the instruction/Torah of his God') is be-libbo ('in his heart') — internalized, not merely memorized. The result: lo tim'ad ashkurav ('his steps do not slip'). The connection is causal: when God's instruction lives inside the heart, the feet find stable ground. This echoes Psalm 1:2-3 and Psalm 119:11 ('I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you').
32. The verb tsofeh ('watches, spies, observes') describes surveillance with hostile intent. The verb mevaqesh lahamito ('seeks to put him to death') reveals the motive: the wicked person's observation is predatory. He watches the righteous the way a hunter watches prey.
33. God intervenes at two levels: He will not leave the righteous be-yado ('in his hand' — in the power of the wicked), and He will not let him be found guilty be-hishshafto ('when he is judged'). God is both rescue-warrior and defense-attorney.
34. The psalm's closing section summarizes its theology in two imperatives: qavveh ('wait, hope') and shemor darkko ('keep/guard His way'). The reward: vi-romimekha lareshet erets ('He will exalt you to inherit the land'). The final phrase be-hikkarit resha'im tir'eh ('when the wicked are cut off, you will see it') promises that the righteous will witness the fulfillment with their own eyes. They will not merely hear about it secondhand.

35. David's personal testimony: *ra'iti rasha arits* ('I have seen a wicked person who was terrifying/ruthless'). The simile *ke-ezrach ra'anan* ('like a native/indigenous green tree') pictures a tree rooted in its own soil — deeply established, lush, apparently permanent. The word *ezrach* means 'native, indigenous' — this tree belongs, it has always been here, it looks immovable.
36. The reversal is abrupt: *vayyaavor* ('and he passed away') — the great tree simply disappeared. The *hinneh einennu* ('behold, he is not!') echoes verse 10. David searched for him (*va-avaqshehu*) and found nothing (*lo nimtsa*). The mighty, spreading tree has vanished as completely as grass in summer. No trace, no stump, no memory.
37. The instruction is observational: *shemor tam* ('watch the blameless one') and *re'eh yashar* ('observe the upright one'). The reason: *ki acharit le-ish shalom* ('for there is a future/end for the person of peace'). The word *acharit* ('end, latter days, future, posterity') means the blameless person has a future that endures. The person of *shalom* ('peace, wholeness') has something the wicked do not: an afterwards.
38. The contrast with verse 37 is total: the righteous have an *acharit* ('future'); the wicked have their *acharit* cut off (*nikhratah*). The verb *nishmadu* ('they are destroyed') from *shamad* ('to annihilate, to exterminate') and the word *yachdav* ('together, altogether') mean the destruction is collective and comprehensive.
39. The psalm nears its conclusion with a declaration of source: *teshu'at tsaddiqim me-YHWH* ('the salvation of the righteous is from the LORD'). Salvation does not come from human effort, military power, or clever strategy — it comes from God. He is their *ma'uzzam* ('their stronghold, their refuge') specifically *be-et tsarah* ('in the time of distress'). God's protection is activated by crisis.
40. The final verse accumulates four verbs of salvation: *ya'azrem* ('He helps them'), *yefalltem* ('He delivers them'), *yefalltem me-resha'im* ('He delivers them from the wicked'), *ve-yoshi'em* ('and He saves them'). The reason is the psalm's foundational verb: *ki chasu vo* ('because they have taken refuge in Him'). The verb *chasah* ('to take refuge') is the Psalter's signature act of faith. The psalm that began by counseling against anger and envy ends by grounding everything in the single act of taking shelter in God.

38

Summary: *A penitential psalm of David, composed 'for remembrance' (le hazkir). David describes his suffering in excruciating physical detail — festering wounds, a bent body, burning loins, failing eyes, a pounding heart — and attributes it to God's wrath against his sin. His friends withdraw. His enemies watch. He has become silent, unable even to defend himself. The psalm ends not with resolution or deliverance but with a raw plea: 'Do not abandon me, O LORD. Be not far from me. Hurry to help me, O Lord, my salvation.' It is one of the most unflinching accounts of suffering in the Psalter.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Unlike Psalm 32, which describes suffering caused by concealed sin and ended by confession, Psalm 38 describes suffering that continues even after acknowledgment. David confesses his sin openly (v. 19) and still the pain persists. The psalm offers no resolution, no turning point, no moment of relief. It begins in agony and ends in agony, with only a thread of hope in the final verse. This makes it one of the most honest prayers in Scripture — a prayer that refuses to manufacture a happy ending. The physical descriptions are among the most graphic in ancient literature: arrows embedded in the flesh (v. 3), wounds that fester and stink (v. 6), burning in the loins (v. 8), a heart that pounds (v. 11), eyes that fail (v. 11). The psalmist's body has become a battlefield between God's discipline and his own sin.*

Translation Friction: *The superscription le hazkir ('for remembrance, for a memorial') is shared only with Psalm 70 and connects to the azkarat offering (the memorial portion of the grain offering, Leviticus 2:2). Some scholars suggest the psalm was recited during that offering. The theology of direct divine punishment for personal sin (God's arrows in the flesh, His hand pressing down) is one that other biblical books qualify — Job questions it, Ecclesiastes undermines it, and Jesus challenges it in John 9:1-3. Psalm 38 does not argue the theology; it lives inside it. David accepts that his suffering is connected to his sin, even as the psalm quietly protests the severity of the punishment.*

Connections: *Psalm 38 is the third of the seven traditional penitential psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143). Its language of physical affliction parallels Job 7 and 30. The imagery of arrows (v. 3) connects to Psalm 64:7 and Lamentations 3:12-13 (where God shoots arrows into the kidneys). The abandonment by friends (v. 12) parallels Psalm 31:11-12 and Job 19:13-19. The silence of the psalmist before accusers (vv. 14-15) anticipates Isaiah's Servant who 'does not open his mouth' (Isaiah 53:7) and Jesus' silence before Pilate (Matthew 27:14).*

¹A psalm of David, for remembrance.

²O LORD, do not rebuke me in your wrath.
Do not discipline me in your burning anger.

³For your arrows have sunk deep into me,
and your hand has come down hard upon me.

⁴There is no soundness in my flesh because of your fury.
There is no wholeness in my bones because of my sin.

⁵For my iniquities have risen over my head.
Like a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me to bear.

⁶My wounds fester and rot
because of my foolishness.

⁷I am bent over and bowed down completely.
All day long I go about in mourning.

⁸For my sides are filled with burning,
and there is no soundness in my flesh.

⁹I am numb and utterly crushed.
I groan from the anguish of my heart.

¹⁰O Lord, all my longing is before you.
My groaning is not hidden from you.

¹¹My heart pounds violently. My strength has left me.
Even the light of my eyes — it too has gone from me.

¹²My loved ones and my friends stand at a distance from my affliction,
and my relatives stand far away.

¹³Those who seek my life set traps for me.
Those who seek my harm speak of destruction
and plot deceit all day long.

¹⁴But I am like a deaf man — I do not hear.
Like a mute person who does not open his mouth.

¹⁵I have become like a person who does not hear,
in whose mouth there are no arguments.

¹⁶For in you, O LORD, I have placed my hope.
You will answer, O Lord my God.

¹⁷For I said, 'Do not let them gloat over me,
those who exalt themselves over me when my foot slips.'

¹⁸For I am on the verge of collapse,
and my pain is always before me.

¹⁹For I confess my iniquity.

I am troubled by my sin.

²⁰But my enemies are vigorous and strong,
and those who hate me falsely are many.

²¹Those who repay evil for good
accuse me because I pursue what is good.

²²Do not abandon me, O LORD.
O my God, do not be far from me.

²³Hurry to help me,
O Lord, my salvation.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The word *le hazkir* ('for remembrance, for a memorial offering') connects this psalm to the sacrificial system. The Hiphil of *zakar* ('to remember') suggests that the psalm is itself an act of bringing something before God's attention — either the psalmist's suffering or his penitence. The same term appears in the headings of Psalm 70.
2. The opening echoes Psalm 6:1 almost verbatim. The two words for divine anger — *qetseph* ('wrath, fury, indignation') and *chamah* ('heat, burning anger, rage') — describe intensity on two registers. David does not ask God to stop disciplining him entirely; he asks God to lower the temperature. The verbs *tokhicheni* ('rebuke me') and *teyassereni* ('discipline me, chasten me') belong to the parent-child vocabulary: this is corrective pain, not vindictive punishment.
3. The arrow imagery for divine punishment appears across the ancient Near East. In the Hebrew Bible, God's arrows represent plague, disaster, or direct affliction (Deuteronomy 32:23, Lamentations 3:12-13, Ezekiel 5:16). The pairing of arrows (distance weapon) and hand (close weapon) means there is no safe range — God's discipline reaches David at every distance.
4. The parallel structure attributes the physical collapse to two causes: God's fury (*za'amekha*) and David's sin (*chattati*). The word *metom* ('soundness, wholeness, health') from *tamam* ('to be complete') means nothing in his flesh is intact. The word *shalom* ('peace, wholeness, well-being') is absent from his bones. The verse makes no attempt to separate the physical from the moral: sin and suffering are intertwined in David's body.
5. The image of *avonot* ('iniquities') rising over the head (*avru roshi*) is like drowning — the water level has passed above the head, and the person is submerged. The simile *ke-massa kaved* ('like a heavy load') shifts to the image of a back-breaking burden. David's sins are simultaneously flood and freight — he is drowning under them and crushed beneath them.
6. The verb *hiv'ishu* ('they stink, they emit a foul odor') and *namaqu* ('they are festering, they are oozing') describe infected wounds in clinical detail. The *chavurotai* ('my wounds, my welts, my stripes') are attributed to *ivalti* ('my foolishness'). The word *ivelet* is not mere stupidity but moral foolishness — the willful choice of the wrong path that Proverbs calls the way of the fool.
7. The verb *na'aveti* ('I am bent, I am twisted') describes a body that can no longer stand straight. The verb *shachoti* ('I am bowed down') intensifies: bent to the ground. The phrase *kol hayyom qoder hillakhti* ('all day long I walk about darkened/in mourning') describes a person who shuffles through life in a permanent posture of grief, face darkened, body hunched.
8. The word *kesalai* ('my loins, my sides, my flanks') refers to the lower back and hip area. The word *nikleh* ('burning, inflammation, something worthless/scorched') describes either a burning skin disease or intense fever in the midsection. The phrase *ein metom bi-vesari* ('there is no soundness in my flesh') repeats verse 4, creating a frame: the body is uniformly damaged.
9. The verb *nefugoti* ('I am numb, I am paralyzed, I am faint') describes someone whose capacity to feel has been overwhelmed — past pain, into numbness. The verb *nidkeiti* ('I am crushed, I am broken') from *dakah* ('to crush, to pulverize'). The verb *sha'agti* ('I have roared, I have groaned') from *nahamat libbi* ('the groaning/roaring of my heart') — the heart itself is making an animal sound of distress.
10. A moment of address amid the catalog of pain. The word *ta'avati* ('my desire, my longing, my craving') means everything David wants — healing, restoration, God's presence — lies open before God. The *anchati* ('my groaning, my sighing') is not hidden (*lo nistrah*) from God. The verse is simultaneously a prayer and a statement of trust: even if David cannot form coherent petitions, God sees his longing and hears his groans.
11. The verb *secharchar* ('palpitates, pounds, goes around and around') describes a heart that races and flutters — a symptom of extreme anxiety or physical illness. The phrase *azavani kochi* ('my strength has abandoned me') means his body's power has deserted him. The final blow: or *einai* ('the light of my eyes') — his vision itself — *gam hem ein itti* ('even they are not with me'). The eyes are failing. David is losing the ability to see. The catalog of physical destruction is nearly total: flesh, bones, wounds, loins, heart, strength, eyes.

12. The social collapse mirrors the physical collapse. The ohavai ('my loved ones') and re'ai ('my friends/companions') stand mi-neged nig'i ('opposite my affliction' — at a safe distance from his disease). The qerovai ('my close relatives, my kinsmen') stand me-rachok ('far off'). The people who should be closest have retreated. Suffering has made David untouchable — a leper in all but name.
13. While friends retreat, enemies advance. The mevaqshei nafshi ('those who seek my life') set traps (vayyenaqshu). The dorshei ra'ati ('those who seek my harm') speak havvot ('destructions, calamities, ruin') and meditate on mirmot ('deceits, treacheries') all day. The combination of social isolation and active persecution creates total vulnerability: no friends to defend him, only enemies to destroy him.
14. David's response to his accusers is total silence. He is ke-cheresh ('like a deaf man') — he does not listen to the accusations. He is ke-illem ('like a mute person') — he does not defend himself. This silence is not passive resignation but deliberate restraint. David could argue, defend, counter-accuse — but he refuses. This posture anticipates Isaiah's Suffering Servant ('like a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth,' Isaiah 53:7) and Jesus' silence before Pilate.
15. The silence deepens: not only does David refuse to speak, but he has no tokhachot ('reproofs, arguments, rebuttals') in his mouth at all. He has emptied himself of defense. The reason for this silence emerges in verse 16: David has transferred his case entirely to God. He is silent before people because he is speaking to God.
16. The reason for silence before human accusers: lekha YHWH hochalti ('in you, O LORD, I have waited/hoped'). David's defense is not in his own mouth but in God's response. The declaration attah ta'aneh ('you will answer') is an act of faith: God will eventually speak on David's behalf. The triple title YHWH...Adonai Elohai ('LORD...Lord my God') piles up divine names as if to anchor the faith more firmly.
17. David's prayer has a specific fear: pen yismchu li ('lest they rejoice over me'). The verb mot ragli ('my foot slips, my foot staggers') describes a stumble that the enemies would exploit. The verb higdilu alai ('they magnify themselves against me') means they enlarge themselves at David's expense — his diminishment is their aggrandizement.
18. The phrase le-tsela nakhon ('ready for stumbling, prepared for falling') means David is at the breaking point — one more push and he falls. His makh'ovi ('my pain') is negdi tamid ('continually before me') — he cannot look away from his own suffering. There is no respite, no distraction, no relief.
19. The confession: avoni aggid ('my iniquity I declare/confess'). The verb aggid ('I tell, I declare, I make known') is a public statement, not a private thought. The verb ed'ag ('I am anxious, I am troubled, I am concerned') from da'ag ('to be anxious') describes the ongoing anguish that sin produces — not just guilt but deep disturbance. Unlike Psalm 32, where confession brought immediate relief, here the confession does not resolve the suffering.
20. The contrast is brutal: David is collapsing, but his enemies are chayyim ('alive, vigorous, full of life') and atsermu ('strong, powerful, numerous'). Those who hate him sheqer ('falsely, without legitimate cause') are rabbou ('have multiplied, have increased'). As David weakens, his enemies grow stronger and more numerous.
21. The theme from Psalm 35:12 returns: meshallemei ra'ah tachat tovah ('those who repay evil in place of good'). The verb yistenuni ('they accuse me, they act as adversaries against me') from satan ('to oppose, to accuse') — they play the adversary role. The reason: tachat rodfi tov ('because I pursue good'). David's pursuit of goodness is itself the offense that provokes their hostility.
22. The closing plea strips away everything except the essential request: al ta'azveni ('do not abandon me') and al tirchaq mimmenni ('do not be far from me'). These are the two things David fears more than pain, more than enemies, more than death: God's absence and God's distance. The double address YHWH...Elohai ('LORD...my God') clings to both the covenant name and the personal relationship.
23. The final word: chushah le-ezrati Adonai teshu'ati ('hurry to my help, O Lord, my salvation'). The verb chushah ('hurry, make haste, come quickly') is the most urgent word in the Hebrew prayer vocabulary. The psalm ends not with resolution but with urgency — a running cry from a person who needs God to arrive now. The title teshu'ati ('my salvation') makes the last word of the psalm the declaration that God is David's rescue, even though the rescue has not yet arrived. This is faith at its rawest: claiming God as salvation while still drowning.

39

Summary: A psalm of David addressed to Jeduthun, one of the three chief temple musicians. David resolves to remain silent so as not to sin with his tongue, especially while the wicked are present. But the suppressed words build like a fire until they burst out in a meditation on the brevity and futility of human life. David asks God to show him the measure of his days, declares that every person is a mere breath (hevel), and that human busyness is all vanity. The psalm ends with a startling prayer: 'Look away from me, that I may brighten before I depart and am no more.'

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 39 is the most Ecclesiastes-like text in the Psalter. The word hevel ('breath, vapor, vanity') — the signature word of Ecclesiastes — appears three times (vv. 6, 7, 12), and the psalm's conclusion about human transience echoes Ecclesiastes almost verbatim. But where Ecclesiastes maintains a philosophical distance from its subject, Psalm 39 is anguished and personal — this is not a sage's meditation but a sufferer's outburst. The closing prayer is astonishing: instead of asking God to draw near (as in most psalms), David asks God to look away (v. 14). The logic is that God's gaze has become unbearable — not because God is hostile but because David cannot survive the intensity of divine scrutiny combined with his own smallness. He wants a moment of reprieve before death.*

Translation Friction: *The address to Jeduthun (Yedutun) in the superscription is debated. Jeduthun was a Levitical musician (1 Chronicles 16:41-42, 25:1-3; 2 Chronicles 5:12). The preposition li-Yedutun could mean 'for Jeduthun' (the musician who will perform it), 'to Jeduthun' (dedicated to him), or 'in the manner of Jeduthun.' The same name appears in Psalm 62 and 77 superscriptions. The final verse's request that God look away (ha'sha mi-menni, 'gaze away from me') has troubled interpreters who expect psalms to end with restored intimacy. Job makes a similar request in Job 7:19 ('Will you not look away from me?') and Job 14:6 ('Look away from him and let him alone'). The psalm sits uncomfortably between trust and exhaustion.*

Connections: *The theme of human brevity connects to Psalm 90:3-6 (Moses' meditation on human frailty), James 4:14 ('you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes'), and 1 Peter 1:24 (quoting Isaiah 40:6-8, 'all flesh is like grass'). The hevel-language links directly to Ecclesiastes 1:2 ('vanity of vanities'). The silence motif (vv. 2-3) connects to Psalm 38:13-14 (where David was also silent before enemies). The image of God as discipliner through illness (v. 12) continues from Psalm 38. The final prayer to 'look away' echoes Job 7:19 and 10:20-21.*

¹For the director of music. For Jeduthun. A psalm of David.

²I said, 'I will guard my ways
so that I do not sin with my tongue.
I will put a muzzle on my mouth
while the wicked are in my presence.'

³I was mute with silence.
I held back, even from good words.
But my pain was stirred up.

⁴My heart grew hot within me.
As I meditated, the fire blazed —
and I spoke with my tongue:

⁵LORD, make me know my end
and the measure of my days — what it is.
Let me know how fleeting I am.

⁶See — you have made my days a few handbreadths,
and my lifespan is as nothing before you.
Surely every person standing firm is nothing but a breath. Selah.

⁷Surely a person walks about as a mere shadow.
Surely they bustle about for nothing.
He heaps up wealth and does not know who will gather it.

⁸And now, Lord, what do I wait for?
My hope — it is in you.

⁹Deliver me from all my transgressions.
Do not make me the scorn of the fool.

¹⁰I am silent. I do not open my mouth,
for you are the one who has done this.

¹¹Remove your plague from me.
I am wasting away from the hostility of your hand.

¹²When you discipline a person with rebukes for iniquity,
you consume what is precious to him like a moth.
Surely every person is a breath. Selah.

¹³Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear to my cry.
Do not be silent at my tears.
For I am a stranger with you,
a sojourner, like all my fathers.

¹⁴Look away from me, that I may brighten,
before I go away and am no more.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Jeduthun (Yedutun) was one of three chief musicians appointed by David for temple worship (alongside Asaph and Heman). His name may derive from yadah ('to praise, to give thanks'). The psalm's assignment to Jeduthun may indicate the musical style, the performing ensemble, or the dedicatee.
2. David's resolution is to control his speech: eshmerah derakhay me-chato bi-leshoni ('I will guard my ways from sinning with my tongue'). The machsom ('muzzle, restraint, bridle') is a vivid image — David is treating his own mouth like a dangerous animal that must be physically restrained. The reason: be-od rasha le-negdi ('while the wicked is before me'). David does not want to give the wicked ammunition by speaking rashly in their presence.
3. The silence goes too far: ne'elamti dumiyyah ('I was struck dumb with stillness'). David stopped speaking entirely — hecheisheti mi-tov ('I was silent from good') — he held back even legitimate, positive speech. The result: u-khe'evi ne'ekar ('and my pain was agitated, was churned up'). Suppressing speech did not resolve the inner turmoil; it intensified it. The pain fermented under the seal of silence.
4. The progression from heat to fire to speech mirrors Jeremiah's experience in Jeremiah 20:9: 'If I say, I will not mention him or speak any more in his name, there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.' Suppressed truth generates internal combustion.
5. David's outburst is not a complaint about the wicked but a plea for perspective on his own mortality. The qitsi ('my end') and middat yamai ('the measure of my days') ask for numerical specificity — how much time do I have left? The phrase mah chadel ani ('how fleeting/transient I am') uses chadel ('ceasing, fleeting, frail'), a word that describes something about to stop existing.
6. The word hevel is one of the most important in the Hebrew Bible. It literally means 'breath, vapor, mist' — something that exists momentarily and then dissipates. Ecclesiastes uses it thirty-eight times to describe the transience and insubstantiality of all human endeavor. Here in Psalm 39, it carries the same force: human life is a breath that barely registers against the backdrop of eternity.
7. Three observations about human futility. First: be-tselem yithallekh ish ('a person walks about as a shadow/image') — the word tselem ('image, shadow, phantom') is the same word used in Genesis 1:26 ('Let us make humanity in our image'). The image of God walks about as a shadow — this is not a denial of the imago Dei but a lament over its fragility. Second: hevel yehemayun ('they bustle about for vapor, they are agitated for nothing'). Third: yitsbor ve-lo yeda mi osefam ('he heaps up and does not know who will gather'). The accumulation that drives human industry is ultimately pointless because the accumulator will not be the beneficiary. Ecclesiastes 2:18-21 develops this identical argument.
8. The pivot. After the meditation on futility, David asks the essential question: mah qivviti ('what have I hoped for? what am I waiting for?'). If everything is breath, what can sustain hope? The answer is four words: tochaliti lekha hi ('my hope — it is to/for you'). When everything else evaporates, God remains. This is not optimism; it is the last thing standing after everything else has been declared vapor.
9. David asks for two things: deliverance from his pesha'ai ('transgressions, rebellions') and protection from the cherpat naval ('reproach/scorn of the fool'). The naval ('fool, senseless person') is the Psalter's moral villain — the person who says 'There is no God' (Psalm 14:1). David does not want his suffering to become proof for the fool's thesis.

10. The silence returns, but now it has a theological reason: *ki attah asita* ('because you have done this'). David's suffering is not random; it comes from God. And because it comes from God, David will not protest. The pronoun *attah* ('you') is emphatic: you, specifically, have done this to me. This is not passive acceptance of fate but active submission to the God who acts.
11. The prayer is direct: *haser me-alay nig'ekha* ('remove from upon me your plague/stroke'). The word *nega* ('plague, blow, stroke, affliction') is the same word used for the plagues of Egypt and for skin diseases in Leviticus 13. The phrase *mi-tigrat yadekha* ('from the hostility/contention of your hand') describes God's hand as combative — fighting against David. The verb *kaliti* ('I am finished, I am exhausted, I am consumed') means David has reached his limit.
12. God's discipline (*be-tokhachot al avon yissarta ish*, 'with rebukes for iniquity you discipline a person') has a specific effect: *vatemes ka-ash chamudo* ('you melt/dissolve like a moth what is precious/desirable to him'). The image of a moth consuming a garment is devastating — it happens slowly, silently, invisibly, and the destruction is irreversible. The refrain *akh hevel kol adam* ('surely every person is a breath') returns, now deepened by the intervening meditation. *Selah*.
13. David's self-description is striking: *ger anokhi immakh* ('I am a stranger/resident alien with you'). The *ger* was a non-citizen living in someone else's land — dependent on the landowner's hospitality, without permanent rights. David says his entire existence on earth is that of a guest in God's territory. The word *toshav* ('sojourner, temporary resident') deepens this: David is passing through, not settling down. And this is not unique to David: *ke-khol avotai* ('like all my ancestors'). Every generation is a guest. The tears (*dim'ati*) are the physical evidence of this displacement — the cry of someone who knows he does not truly belong.
14. The prayer 'look away from me' (*hasha mimmenni*) reverses the normal psalmist's request. Usually the plea is 'do not hide your face' or 'look upon me.' Here, God's attention has become a burden, not a comfort. Job 7:19 makes the same request: 'Will you not look away from me for an instant, and leave me alone long enough to swallow my spit?' The prayer is not for permanent divine absence but for a moment of reprieve — a breath of mercy in the gap between suffering and death.

40

Summary: *A psalm of David that moves in two dramatic movements: first, a testimony of deliverance from the pit (vv. 2-11) — God lifted him out, set his feet on rock, put a new song in his mouth, and revealed that what He truly desires is not sacrifice but obedient ears — and second, a desperate plea from a new crisis (vv. 12-18). The psalm's emotional trajectory is startling: the first half celebrates rescue already accomplished; the second half cries out for rescue not yet arrived. David holds both experiences simultaneously — past deliverance and present danger — without resolving the tension.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Verses 7-9 contain one of the most theologically significant statements about sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible. David declares that God did not desire (lo chafatsta) sacrifice (zevach), offering (minchah), burnt offering (olah), or sin offering (chata'ah) — the four major categories of the Israelite sacrificial system. Instead: oznayim karita li ('ears you dug/hollowed out for me'). The image is extraordinary: God excavated David's ears — bored them open, shaped them for hearing. What God wants is not the smoke of burned animals but a person whose ears have been opened to hear and obey. The writer of Hebrews 10:5-7 quotes this passage (via the LXX, which reads 'a body you prepared for me' instead of 'ears you dug for me') and applies it to Christ's incarnation — the ultimate replacement of animal sacrifice with personal obedience. In its original Hebrew context, the statement is a prophetic critique of the sacrificial system from within the psalmic tradition itself.*

Translation Friction: *The relationship between the two halves of this psalm is debated. The sudden shift from joyful testimony (vv. 2-11) to urgent plea (vv. 12-18) has led some scholars to argue that two originally separate psalms were joined. Psalm 70 is virtually identical to verses 14-18, supporting the theory that these verses once circulated independently. The phrase oznayim karita li ('ears you dug for me') is textually significant: the LXX translates it as soma de katertiso moi ('a body you prepared for me'), which is the version quoted in Hebrews 10:5. The MT's 'ears' and the LXX's 'body' are different readings with different theological implications, though both point toward the same conclusion: God wants obedient presence, not ritual performance.*

Connections: *Hebrews 10:5-10 quotes verses 7-9 as the words of Christ entering the world, making this psalm christologically central in the New Testament. The critique of sacrifice echoes 1 Samuel 15:22 ('to obey is better than sacrifice'), Hosea 6:6 ('I desire faithful love and not sacrifice'), Micah 6:6-8, and Isaiah 1:11-17. Psalm 70 duplicates verses 14-18 almost word for word. The 'new song' (shir chadash) of verse 4 connects to Psalms 33:3, 96:1, 98:1, and*

144:9. The 'scroll of the book' (megillat sefer) in verse 8 has been interpreted as the Torah, a prophetic commission, or a heavenly decree about David's destiny.

¹For the director of music. A psalm of David.

²I waited — waited intently — for the LORD,
and He leaned down to me and heard my cry.

³He lifted me out of the pit of destruction,
out of the miry mud.
He set my feet on a rock
and made my steps secure.

⁴He put a new song in my mouth,
a hymn of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear
and put their trust in the LORD.

⁵Blessed is the person who makes the LORD his trust
and does not turn to the arrogant
or to those who chase after lies.

⁶Many are the wonders you have done, O LORD my God,
and your plans for us —
nothing can compare to you.
If I tried to declare and tell of them,
they would be too many to count.

⁷Sacrifice and offering you did not desire —
ears you dug for me.
Burnt offering and sin offering you did not require.

⁸Then I said, 'See — I have come.
In the scroll of the book it is written about me.

⁹I delight to do your will, O my God.
Your instruction is within my inmost being.'

¹⁰I proclaimed good news of righteousness in the great assembly.
See — I did not seal my lips.
O LORD, you know this.

¹¹I did not hide your righteousness within my heart.
I spoke of your faithfulness and your salvation.
I did not conceal your faithful love and your truth
from the great assembly.

¹²You, O LORD, will not withhold your compassion from me.
Your faithful love and your truth
will always guard me.

¹³For evils beyond number have surrounded me.
My iniquities have overtaken me — I cannot see.
They are more than the hairs of my head,
and my heart has failed me.

¹⁴Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me.
O LORD, hurry to help me.

¹⁵Let those who seek to destroy my life
be shamed and disgraced together.
Let those who delight in my ruin
be turned back and humiliated.

¹⁶Let those who say to me, 'Ha! Ha!'
be appalled at their own shame.

¹⁷Let all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you.
Let those who love your salvation say continually,
'The LORD is great!'

¹⁸As for me — I am poor and needy,
but the Lord thinks of me.
You are my help and my deliverer.
O my God, do not delay.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The standard *la-menatseach le-David mizmor* heading places this psalm in the Davidic collection for liturgical performance.
2. The infinitive absolute construction (*qavvoh qivviti*) is one of Hebrew's strongest emphasis markers. It could be rendered 'I certainly waited,' 'I waited and waited,' or 'I waited with all my being.' The construction communicates that the waiting itself was an act of faith — not passive but strenuously sustained.
3. The *bor* ('pit, cistern, well') is a common image for Sheol, death, or desperate trouble in the Psalms (Psalms 28:1, 30:3, 69:15, 88:4). The *sha'on* ('roaring, tumult, destruction') may describe the sound of rushing water at the bottom of the pit or the noise of chaos. The *sela* ('rock, cliff, crag') is the opposite of *tit ha-yaven* ('miry mud') — one swallows you, the other supports you.
4. The *shir chadash* ('new song') is not merely a recently composed song but a song that responds to a new act of God — unprecedented mercy demands unprecedented music. God is both the rescuer and the songwriter: *vayyitten be-fi* ('He put in my mouth'). David does not compose the song; God places it there. The result is evangelistic: *yir'u rabbim ve-yira'u ve-yivtechu ba-YHWH* ('many will see and fear and trust in the LORD'). David's rescue becomes a public testimony that draws others to faith.
5. The *ashrei* ('blessed') formula praises the person whose *mivtacho* ('his trust, his confidence') is placed in the LORD. The contrasts are *rehabim* ('the proud, the arrogant, the boastful') and *satei khazav* ('those who turn aside to falsehood'). The *rehab* may also be a mythological reference to the sea-monster Rahab, symbolizing chaotic powers — trusting in proud, boastful forces rather than in God.
6. The scope expands from personal testimony to cosmic praise. God's *nifle'otekha* ('your wonders, your extraordinary deeds') and *machshevotekha* ('your plans, your thoughts') toward us (*eleinu*) are innumerable. The phrase *ein arokh elekha* ('nothing can be arranged/compared to you') means God is incomparable — every attempt to measure Him fails. The final phrase *atsemu mi-sapper* ('they are too numerous to count') admits the inadequacy of language: David's new song can only sample from an infinite playlist.
7. The phrase *oznayim karita li* has been interpreted in several ways: (1) God bored David's ears open, creating the capacity for obedience; (2) an allusion to the ear-piercing ceremony of Exodus 21:5-6, where a slave who chooses to remain with his master has his ear pierced against a doorpost — an act of voluntary, permanent servitude; (3) the LXX reads *soma de katertiso moi* ('a body you prepared for me'), which Hebrews 10:5 quotes. The MT's 'ears' is the harder reading and likely original. The LXX's 'body' may be an interpretive expansion: the ear stands for the whole person.
7. The prophetic critique of sacrifice-without-obedience runs through the Hebrew Bible: 1 Samuel 15:22, Isaiah 1:11-17, Jeremiah 7:22-23, Hosea 6:6, Amos 5:21-24, Micah 6:6-8. David's statement here is not a rejection of the sacrificial system but a declaration of its purpose: sacrifice without the opened ear is theater.

8. David responds to the opened ears with total availability: *hinneh va'ti* ('Behold, I have come'). The phrase *bi-megillat sefer katuv alai* ('in the scroll of the book it is written about me') refers to a written document — possibly the Torah, a prophetic oracle, a heavenly register, or a royal commissioning decree. Whatever the specific referent, David understands that his life has a script written by God, and he has come to fulfill it. Hebrews 10:7 applies these words to Christ entering the world.
9. The verb *chafatsti* ('I desire, I delight') — the same verb that described what God does not desire regarding sacrifice (v. 7) — now describes what David desires: *la'asot retsonkha* ('to do your will/pleasure'). The reversal is complete: God does not delight in sacrifice; David delights in obedience. God's *toratekha* ('your Torah/instruction') is *be-tokh me'ai* ('within my intestines/inmost parts'). The *me'ayim* ('intestines, bowels, inner organs') are the deepest interior of the body — Torah has been swallowed, digested, and absorbed into David's very organs.
10. The verb *bissarti* ('I proclaimed good news, I bore tidings') from *basar* is the Hebrew root behind the New Testament's *euangelion* ('gospel, good news'). David has been an evangelist: he proclaimed *tsedeq* ('righteousness, vindication') in the *qahal rav* ('great assembly'). His lips were not sealed (*lo ekhla*, 'I did not restrain') — unlike his silence in Psalm 39, here he speaks freely. The appeal *YHWH attah yadata* ('LORD, you know') calls God as witness to his faithfulness.
11. Five divine attributes David has publicly proclaimed: *tsidqatekha* ('your righteousness'), *emunatekha* ('your faithfulness'), *teshu'atekha* ('your salvation'), *chasdekha* ('your faithful love'), and *amittekha* ('your truth/reliability'). He did not hide (*lo khissiti*) or conceal (*lo khichadti*) any of them. The repetition of *qahal rav* ('great assembly') from verse 10 emphasizes that David's testimony is public, not private. Concealing God's attributes would be a form of theft from the congregation.
12. The verse pivots from testimony to petition. The logic is: since I did not withhold your attributes from the assembly (vv. 10-11), do not withhold your *rachamekha* ('your compassion, your mercies') from me. The pair *chasdekha va-amittekha* ('your faithful love and your truth') becomes David's personal bodyguard: *tamid yitseruni* ('they will always protect me, they will always guard me'). The verb *natsar* ('to guard, to watch over, to protect') turns divine attributes into active agents of preservation.
13. The second half of the psalm begins with a new crisis. The *ra'ot* ('evils, disasters') are *ad ein mispar* ('without number'). David's *avonot* ('iniquities') have caught him (*hissiguni*, 'they have overtaken me') — sin is personified as a pursuer who has finally caught its quarry. The result: *lo yakholti lir'ot* ('I am unable to see') — he is blinded by the sheer volume of trouble. They outnumber the hairs of his head. And his *lev* ('heart') — the seat of courage and will — *azavani* ('has abandoned me'). This is the same David who just sang a new song and proclaimed God's faithfulness. The psalm holds both realities.
14. From here through verse 18, the text is virtually identical to Psalm 70 (which circulated as an independent psalm). The doubled *YHWH* creates urgency: *LORD, deliver — LORD, hurry*. The verb *retseh* ('be pleased, be willing, consent') does not demand but appeals: be willing to rescue me.
15. The imprecation follows the pattern of Psalm 35:4, 26. The four verbs of defeat — *yevoshu* ('be shamed'), *yachperu* ('be disgraced'), *yissogu* *achor* ('be driven back'), *yikkalemu* ('be humiliated') — describe a comprehensive rout. The phrase *mevaqshei nafshi lispotah* ('those who seek my soul to sweep it away') pictures the enemies as people trying to annihilate David's very existence.
16. The gloating cry *he'ach he'ach* ('Aha! Aha!') from Psalm 35:21 returns — the sound of malicious delight at David's suffering. The verb *yashommu* ('let them be appalled, let them be horrified') turns the mockers' joy into horror: their own *boshtam* ('shame') will become the thing that appalls them.
17. The contrast with verse 16: those who seek David's ruin will be shamed, but those who seek God (*mevaqshekha*) will rejoice. The phrase *ohavei teshu'atekha* ('those who love your salvation') describes people whose primary desire is God's saving action. Their refrain: *yigdal YHWH* ('let the LORD be magnified/great') — the same perpetual song as Psalm 35:27.
18. The tension between verse 2 ('I waited patiently') and verse 18 ('do not delay') is not a contradiction but the full range of prayer. Faith includes both sustained patience and urgent pleading. The psalmist who waited intently for the LORD in the past now cries for the LORD to come quickly in the present. Both are trust.

41

Summary: *Psalm 41 closes Book I of the Psalter (Psalms 1-41) with a psalm of David about the faithful person who cares for the weak. The psalmist moves from a wisdom-style beatitude about those who attend to the poor (daleth), through a personal lament about illness and betrayal by a trusted friend, to a declaration of trust in the LORD who upholds him. The psalm ends with a doxology that seals the entire first book.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The center of this psalm is one of the most piercing betrayal texts in the Hebrew Bible: 'Even my close friend, whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me' (v. 10). The Hebrew gam ish shelomi asher batachti bo okhel lachmi higdil alai aqev is devastating in its specificity — this is not a stranger but a covenant-meal companion. The image of lifting the heel (higdil alai aqev) may suggest a horse kicking its master, or a wrestler's treacherous move. The New Testament will apply this verse directly to Judas (John 13:18). The doxology in verse 14 —*

'Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Amen and Amen' — is not part of the psalm proper but an editorial addition marking the end of Book I. Each of the five books of the Psalter ends with a similar doxology.

Translation Friction: The superscription lam'natseach mizmor le-David ('For the choirmaster, a psalm of David') assigns authorship, but the content — illness, enemies who wish him dead, a betraying friend — fits many possible life settings. The term dal in verse 2 is often translated 'poor' but means specifically 'weak, thin, low, helpless' — someone diminished in power or resources. The beatitude form (ashre) at the opening connects this psalm to Psalm 1, creating a literary frame around Book I: both begin with ashre. The phrase 'you have upheld me in my integrity' (v. 13) is bold — the psalmist claims tummah (moral wholeness) despite his suffering, refusing to accept that illness equals divine punishment.

Connections: Psalm 41 forms an inclusio with Psalm 1: both open with ashre ('blessed/happy is the one who...'). The betrayal by a table-companion (v. 10) resonates with the psalms of David's court crises, particularly the Absalom psalms (3, 55, 63). The identification of this friend may connect to Ahithophel (2 Samuel 15:12, 16:23). The doxology (v. 14) parallels the closing doxologies of Book II (72:18-19), Book III (89:53), Book IV (106:48), and Book V (150, which is itself the doxology). Jesus quotes verse 10 in John 13:18, applying it to Judas Iscariot's betrayal during the Passover meal.

¹For the choirmaster. A psalm of David.

²Blessed is the one who gives thought to the weak —
in the day of trouble the LORD will rescue him.

³The LORD will guard him and keep him alive;
he will be declared blessed in the land.
Do not give him over to the appetite of his enemies.

⁴The LORD will sustain him on his bed of illness;
you transform his entire resting place when he is sick.

⁵I said, "LORD, show me grace;
heal my life, for I have sinned against you."

⁶My enemies speak malice about me:
"When will he die and his name vanish?"

⁷When one comes to visit, he speaks emptiness;
his heart gathers up trouble,
then he goes outside and spreads it.

⁸All who hate me whisper together against me;
against me they plot harm.

⁹"A vile thing has been poured into him;
now that he lies down, he will never rise again."

¹⁰Even my close friend whom I trusted,
who ate my bread,
has raised his heel against me.

¹¹But you, LORD — show me grace and raise me up,
so that I may repay them.

¹²By this I know that you delight in me:
my enemy does not shout in triumph over me.

¹³As for me, you have upheld me in my integrity
and set me before your face forever.

¹⁴Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,
from everlasting to everlasting.
Amen and Amen.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. lam'natseach ('for the choirmaster/director') derives from natsach, which can mean 'to lead, to oversee, to endure.' The term appears in 55 psalm superscriptions and likely indicates a liturgical performance direction. mizmor ('psalm') comes from zamar ('to sing, to make music with instruments'), indicating this is a composed song for instrumental accompaniment.
2. dal ('weak, poor, thin, helpless') is distinct from ani ('afflicted') and evyon ('destitute'). dal emphasizes diminished capacity — someone who has been reduced, who lacks the power to help themselves. The maskil ('one who gives wise attention') combines intellectual discernment with practical care.
2. The ashre opening creates a deliberate inclusio with Psalm 1:1, framing Book I of the Psalter between two beatitudes. Psalm 1 blesses the one who avoids wickedness and meditates on Torah; Psalm 41 blesses the one who cares for the weak.
3. The shift from third person ('the LORD will guard him') to second person ('do not give him') is characteristic of Hebrew prayer, where the psalmist moves fluidly between speaking about God and speaking to God. The phrase be-nefesh oyeavav ('to the appetite/desire of his enemies') uses nefesh in its sense of 'throat, desire, craving' — the enemies want to consume him.
4. The verb hafakh ('to turn, to overturn') is dramatic — it is used of God overturning cities (Genesis 19:25) and turning rivers to blood (Exodus 7:17). Applied to a sickbed, it creates a startling image: God overturns the conditions of illness. The intimacy of God tending a sick person's bed is unusual in ancient Near Eastern literature, where the gods generally do not stoop to such care.
5. The psalmist's confession ki chatati lakh ('for I have sinned against you') is the only explicit admission of sin in the psalm. It stands in tension with verse 13, where the psalmist claims God upholds him 'in my integrity' (be-tummi). This is not a contradiction but a nuance: the psalmist acknowledges moral imperfection while maintaining that his fundamental orientation toward God is whole. nefesh here means 'life, self, entire being' — not merely 'soul' in a body-soul dualism.
6. The enemies' question matai yamut ve-avad shemo ('when will he die and his name perish?') reveals their deepest wish — not merely the psalmist's death but the extinction of his legacy. In Hebrew thought, the name (shem) carries identity across generations. To have one's name perish (avad, 'to be lost, to be destroyed') is annihilation beyond death.
7. The scene is a sick-visit gone wrong. The visitor speaks shav ('emptiness, falsehood, deception') to the psalmist's face while internally collecting ammunition — yiqbots aven lo ('he gathers up wickedness for himself'). Once outside (yetse la-chuts), he spreads the gossip. The three-stage sequence — enter, gather, broadcast — is a precise anatomy of malicious social behavior.
8. The verb yitlachashu ('they whisper') comes from lachash, which can mean 'to whisper, to charm, to practice enchantment.' The whispering of enemies may carry overtones of magical incantation — in the ancient world, illness was often attributed to curses, and whispering enemies may be perceived as casting spells. At minimum, it describes conspiratorial murmuring.
9. beliyya'al is one of the most theologically loaded terms in the Hebrew Bible. It appears in Deuteronomy for worthless people, in Judges for wicked men, and eventually becomes a title for the anti-God figure in later Jewish and Christian texts (2 Corinthians 6:15 uses 'Belial'). Here it describes not a person but a 'thing' — a destructive force or condition that the enemies believe has permanently seized the psalmist.
10. Jesus quotes this verse in John 13:18 during the Last Supper, applying it to Judas Iscariot. The connection is precise: Judas was a table-companion who shared bread with Jesus and then betrayed him. The Hebrew higdil alai aqev ('lifted the heel against me') may be an idiom from wrestling (a treacherous heel-trip) or from the behavior of a horse that kicks its rider. In either case, the violence comes from someone positioned as an intimate.
10. The connection to Ahithophel — David's counselor who defected to Absalom (2 Samuel 15:12) — is strong. Ahithophel was David's trusted advisor, his ish shelomi, who ate at his table and then joined the conspiracy. His betrayal is the historical backdrop for this verse's anguish.
11. The petition va-ashalemah lahem ('that I may repay them') uses the piel of shalam ('to repay, to make whole, to complete'). The psalmist is not asking for private revenge but for the opportunity to settle accounts — to see justice done. In the context of ancient royal justice, the king who rises from his sickbed would judge those who conspired during his illness.
12. The verb chafatsta ('you delight in, you take pleasure in') is stronger than mere favor — it expresses God's active desire toward the psalmist. The evidence of this delight is negative: lo yaria oyevi alai ('my enemy does not raise a war-cry over me'). The verb yaria means 'to shout, to sound a battle cry, to raise an alarm.' The psalmist is still alive, still standing — the enemy's premature death announcement (v. 9) has not come true.

13. The tension between verse 5 ('I have sinned against you') and verse 13 ('in my integrity') is instructive. *tummah* does not mean moral perfection; it means wholeness of intent, undivided loyalty, a heart that is not double. The psalmist can acknowledge specific failures while maintaining that his fundamental commitment to God is complete.
14. This verse is an editorial doxology, not part of David's original composition. The five-book structure of the Psalter mirrors the five books of Moses (Torah), and each division is sealed with a closing benediction. Book I ends here; Book II begins with Psalm 42 and the psalms of the Sons of Korah.
14. *amen* derives from the root *aman* ('to be firm, to be trustworthy, to confirm'). To say *amen* is to declare 'it is firm, it is established, so let it be.' The doubling intensifies the affirmation.

42

Summary: *Psalm 42 opens Book II of the Psalter and is attributed to the Sons of Korah. It is the first half of what was originally a single psalm (42-43), as indicated by the shared refrain ('Why are you cast down, O my soul?'), identical structure, and the fact that Psalm 43 lacks a superscription — unique among its neighbors. The psalmist is in exile, far from the Temple, possibly in the region of the Jordan headwaters near Mount Hermon. He thirsts for God's presence the way a deer pants for flowing water, remembers leading processions to the house of God, and battles despair while enemies taunt him with 'Where is your God?'*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The opening image — *ke-ayal ta'aarog al afiqe mayim* ('as a deer pants for channels of water') — is one of the most famous metaphors in all literature. The verb *ta'aarog* appears only here and in Joel 1:20 (where animals groan for water in drought), making it an extremely rare word that conveys desperate, physical longing. The psalm's structure is built around a three-fold refrain (42:6, 42:12, 43:5) in which the psalmist interrogates his own soul: 'Why are you cast down?' This internal dialogue — the self-addressing the self in God's presence — is a remarkable psychological portrait. The psalmist does not deny his despair; he questions it, argues with it, and ultimately commands his soul to hope. The geography is specific: the land of the Jordan, Mount Hermon, and Mount Mizar (a small peak, perhaps near Caesarea Philippi). Deep calls to deep (*tehom el tehom*) at the sound of God's waterfalls — the very water he thirsts for becomes an image of overwhelming chaos.*

Translation Friction: *The superscription assigns this to the *bene Qorach* ('Sons of Korah'), a levitical guild of Temple musicians descended from Korah, whose rebellion and death are recorded in Numbers 16. That the descendants of a rebel became the Temple's premier musicians is itself a story of redemption. The phrase *be-har mits'ar* ('on Mount Mizar') is debated — *mits'ar* means 'smallness,' so this may be 'the little mountain,' an actual place name, or a metaphor for the psalmist's diminished state in contrast to Mount Zion's greatness. The Elohistic Psalter (42-83) consistently uses *Elohim* rather than *YHVH*, probably due to editorial substitution. We retain *LORD* where the original likely read *YHVH*.*

Connections: *Psalms 42-43 form a single literary unit, as demonstrated by the triple refrain, shared vocabulary, and the absence of a superscription on Psalm 43. The deer imagery connects to Song of Songs 2:9, 17, where the beloved is compared to a gazelle. The phrase 'deep calls to deep' (*tehom el tehom*, v. 8) evokes Genesis 1:2 (*tehom*, the primordial deep) and Jonah 2:4-6 (the waters of chaos overwhelming the drowning prophet). The taunt 'Where is your God?' (v. 4, 11) appears also in Joel 2:17 and Micah 7:10, always as the enemy's mockery of God's apparent absence.*

¹For the choirmaster. A maskil of the Sons of Korah.

²As a deer pants for channels of water,
so my soul pants for you, O God.

³My soul thirsts for God,
for the living God.
When will I come and see the face of God?

⁴My tears have been my food day and night,
while they say to me all day long,
"Where is your God?"

⁵These things I remember, and I pour out my soul within me:
how I used to walk with the throng,
leading them in procession to the house of God,
with shouts of joy and thanksgiving —
a multitude keeping festival.

⁶Why are you cast down, my soul,
and why do you groan within me?
Hope in God, for I will yet praise him —
the salvation of his face.

⁷My God, my soul is cast down within me;
therefore I remember you
from the land of the Jordan and the Hermons,
from Mount Mizar.

⁸Deep calls to deep
at the sound of your waterfalls;
all your breakers and your waves
have swept over me.

⁹By day the LORD commands his faithful love,
and at night his song is with me —
a prayer to the God of my life.

¹⁰I say to God my rock,
"Why have you forgotten me?
Why must I walk in darkness
under the pressure of the enemy?"

¹¹Like a shattering blow to my bones,
my adversaries taunt me,
saying to me all day long,
"Where is your God?"

¹²Why are you cast down, my soul,
and why do you groan within me?
Hope in God, for I will yet praise him —
the salvation of my face and my God.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. maskil may derive from sakal ('to be prudent, to give insight') and likely indicates a psalm of instruction or contemplation. The bene Qorach ('Sons of Korah') were a levitical guild of Temple singers and musicians. Their ancestor Korah led a rebellion against Moses (Numbers 16) and was swallowed by the earth, but his sons survived (Numbers 26:11) — a detail that makes their role as worship leaders a living testimony to grace surviving judgment.

2. The Hebrew *ayal* is masculine ('stag, hart'), though many translations render it 'deer' generically. The LXX uses the feminine form (*elaphos*), and the Christian tradition has often depicted a female deer. The gender matters less than the image: a wild animal in extremity, reduced to its most basic need.
2. The *afiq mayim* ('channels of water') are not stagnant pools but flowing streams — the word *afiq* refers to a channel or riverbed where water runs. The psalmist does not want stored religion or past experience; he wants the living, moving presence of God.
3. The phrase *pene Elohim* ('the face of God') was a technical term for the Temple experience. Deuteronomy 16:16 commands all males to 'appear before the face of the LORD' (*yera'eh et pene YHVH*) three times a year. The Masoretes repointed the verb from active ('see') to passive ('appear/be seen'), probably to avoid the theologically bold idea that a human could see God's face (cf. Exodus 33:20). The older, active reading preserves the psalmist's yearning: he wants to gaze upon God.
4. The image of tears as bread (*dim'ati lechem*) inverts the normal sustenance of life — instead of eating food, the psalmist feeds on grief. The taunt *ayyeh Elohekha* ('where is your God?') is the cruelest question in the Psalter. It does not deny God's existence but mocks God's apparent indifference to the sufferer. The psalmist's exile from the Temple makes the question bite deeper: if God dwells in Zion and the psalmist cannot reach Zion, then the enemies' taunt has geographical force.
5. The verb *eddaddem* is difficult. It may derive from *dadah* ('to move slowly, to lead gently') and would mean 'I led them in slow procession.' Some relate it to *dud* ('a pot') and read 'I walked among them.' The overall picture is clear: the psalmist was once at the center of pilgrim worship, possibly as a levitical leader, and now he is cut off from it entirely.
6. This refrain appears three times: here (42:6), at 42:12, and at 43:5. The slight variations between the three occurrences are theologically significant — by the third repetition in 43:5, the psalmist has added 'my God' (*Elohai*), moving from addressing God to claiming God as his own.
6. *yeshu'ot panav* ('salvations of his face') is an unusual construct. *panav* ('his face') may function as the subject ('his face is salvation') or as the source ('salvation from his face/presence'). Either way, the psalmist locates deliverance in the direct, face-to-face encounter with God.
7. The geography locates the psalmist precisely: the land of the Jordan (*erets Yarden*) near the Hermon range (*chermonim*, plural, referring to Hermon's multiple peaks) and *har mits'ar* ('Mount Mizar/the small mountain'). This places him in the far north of Israel, near the source of the Jordan River — as far from the Temple in Jerusalem as one could be while still within Israelite territory. *mits'ar* means 'smallness,' which may be a place name or a pointed contrast: the psalmist stands on a small, insignificant mountain, remembering the great mountain of Zion where God dwells.
8. *tehom* ('deep, abyss') is cognate with the Babylonian *Tiamat*, the chaos-sea goddess. In Genesis 1:2, *tehom* is the formless deep over which God's spirit hovers. Here, one *tehom* calls to another — chaos communicates with chaos, and the psalmist is caught between them.
8. The paradox of water in this psalm is striking: in verse 2, the psalmist thirsts for water like a deer. In verse 8, water overwhelms him. The same element he craves is the element destroying him — a profound image of how the encounter with God can be simultaneously longed-for and overwhelming.
9. This is one of the few places in the Elohist Psalter (42-83) where *YHVH* appears instead of *Elohim*, suggesting it survived the editorial substitution process. The phrase *El chayyai* ('God of my life') is intimate — not 'the living God' (*El chai*, v. 3) but 'the God who is the source of my specific, individual life.'
10. The psalmist addresses God as *sal'i* ('my rock, my cliff, my crag') — a title of stability and protection — and then immediately accuses this rock of forgetting him. The juxtaposition is intentional: the one he calls 'rock' seems to have abandoned him. *qoder* ('dark, gloomy, in mourning') describes both the psalmist's emotional state and his outward appearance — the word suggests wearing mourning garments. *lachsats* ('pressure, oppression, affliction') is a physical word: the enemy is pressing down on him.
11. The word *retsach* ('murder, killing, crushing blow') is extreme — the enemies' taunts are not mere words but violence that penetrates to the bone. The repetition of *ayyeh Elohekha* ('where is your God?') from verse 4 shows that this mockery is relentless and central to the psalmist's suffering. The taunt strikes at the very thing the psalmist clings to — his relationship with God — and uses his exile from the Temple as evidence that God has abandoned him.
12. The variation between verse 6 (*panav*, 'his face') and verse 12 (*panai*, 'my face') is debated. Some manuscripts read *panav* in both places. If *panai* is original, the meaning shifts: God is the salvation 'of my face' — meaning God restores the psalmist's countenance, lifting his bowed head. Either reading is powerful.

43

Summary: *Psalm 43 is the second half of the original single psalm that began with Psalm 42. It has no superscription — the only psalm in this section of the Psalter without one — confirming its unity with the preceding psalm. The psalmist shifts from lament to petition, asking God to send light and truth as guides to lead him back to the holy mountain and the dwelling of God. The psalm culminates in the third and final repetition of the refrain: 'Why are you cast down, my soul?'*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The movement from Psalm 42 to Psalm 43 traces the arc of prayer itself. Psalm 42 is dominated by memory and grief — the psalmist remembers what he has lost and weeps. Psalm 43 turns that grief into bold petition: 'Send out your light and your truth — let them lead me.' The personification of light (or) and truth (emet) as guides, almost as angelic escorts, is stunning. They are not abstract qualities but active agents sent from God's throne to conduct the exiled worshiper back to Zion. The final refrain in verse 5 reaches its fullest form, adding both 'my God' (as in 42:12) and the emphatic particle — the psalmist has argued himself from despair toward hope through three rounds of self-interrogation.*

Translation Friction: *The absence of a superscription on Psalm 43 is the strongest evidence that it was originally joined to Psalm 42. In the Masoretic tradition they are separated, but the LXX manuscripts vary, and several Hebrew manuscripts combine them. The phrase *goy lo chasid* ('an ungodly nation') in verse 1 is unusual — *goy* typically means 'nation, people' and could refer to foreign oppressors or, more provocatively, to faithless members of Israel itself. The psalmist's petition 'judge me' (*shafeteni*) is not a request for punishment but for vindication — a courtroom appeal for the divine judge to rule in his favor.*

Connections: *The light-and-truth motif (v. 3) connects to Psalm 36:10 ('in your light we see light') and to the priestly Urim and Thummim, whose names may mean 'lights and perfections/truths.' The holy mountain (*har qodshekha*) is Zion (Psalm 2:6, 48:2), and the *mishkanot* ('dwelling places') echo the tabernacle (*mishkan*). The entire 42-43 unit serves as a gateway to Book II of the Psalter, establishing its dominant themes: exile, longing for the Temple, the quest for God's presence, and the tension between despair and hope.*

¹Vindicate me, O God, and plead my case
against a nation without faithful love.
From the man of deceit and injustice, rescue me.

²For you are the God of my stronghold.
Why have you rejected me?
Why must I walk in darkness
under the pressure of the enemy?

³Send out your light and your truth —
let them lead me,
let them bring me to your holy mountain
and to your dwelling places.

⁴Then I will come to the altar of God,
to God, the gladness of my joy,
and I will praise you with the lyre,
O God, my God.

⁵Why are you cast down, my soul,
and why do you groan within me?
Hope in God, for I will yet praise him —

the salvation of my face and my God.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The phrase *goy lo chasid* ('a nation without faithful love') is striking. *goy* usually refers to a foreign nation, but in the context of the psalm's internal Israelite setting (Temple, Zion, Levitical worship), it may describe faithless Israelites — people who have abandoned *chesed*. Rendering *lo chasid* as 'without faithful love' rather than 'ungodly' preserves the specific covenantal charge.
2. The verse nearly duplicates 42:10 but shifts from 'my rock' (*sal'i*) to 'the God of my stronghold' (*Elohe ma'uzzi*). *ma'oz* ('stronghold, fortress, refuge') comes from *azaz* ('to be strong'). The psalmist's accusation is sharper here: not merely 'forgotten' (42:10) but *zanachtani* ('you have rejected me, you have cast me off'). *zanach* is a strong verb of deliberate abandonment. The tension between calling God 'my stronghold' and accusing God of rejection is the psalm's emotional center.
3. The pairing of *or* ('light') and *emet* ('truth') may echo the priestly Urim and Thummim (*urim* may derive from *or*, 'light'; *thummim* from *tamam*, 'completeness/truth'). If so, the psalmist is asking God to send the same guiding instruments that directed priestly decisions — a deeply levitical prayer, fitting for a Son of Korah.
3. *emet* ('truth') in Hebrew is not primarily intellectual but relational — it means 'reliability, faithfulness, firmness.' God's truth is not a set of propositions but a quality of character: God is firm, stable, and can be relied upon. Sending truth as a guide means sending divine reliability itself.
4. *simchat gili* ('the gladness of my joy/exultation') is a construct chain where both nouns express delight, creating an intensified expression — God is not merely a source of happiness but the gladness within the gladness, the deepest layer of joy itself.
5. The three-fold refrain structure (42:6, 42:12, 43:5) mirrors the three-fold structure of lament psalms generally (invocation, complaint, trust/praise). The fact that 42-43 was one psalm means this refrain divides the single composition into three equal movements: longing and memory (42:2-6), suffering and chaos (42:7-12), and petition and vision (43:1-5).

44

Summary: *Psalm 44 is a national lament of the Sons of Korah, spoken by the community after a devastating military defeat. The psalm moves through four distinct movements: remembrance of God's past saving acts in the conquest (vv. 2-9), the present crisis of defeat and disgrace (vv. 10-17), a protestation of innocence — the community has not broken covenant (vv. 18-23), and a desperate plea for God to awaken and act (vv. 24-27). The psalm's theological nerve is its insistence that the defeat cannot be explained by Israel's unfaithfulness.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 44 is one of the boldest texts in the Hebrew Bible because it directly confronts the retribution principle — the theology that suffering results from sin. The community insists: 'All this has come upon us, yet we have not forgotten you, and we have not been false to your covenant' (v. 18). This is not Job's individual protest but an entire community saying to God: we did not break faith, and you still let us be slaughtered. Verse 23 — 'For your sake we are killed all day long; we are counted as sheep for slaughter' — will be quoted by Paul in Romans 8:36 to argue that suffering does not separate believers from God's love. The psalm's final cry, 'Awake! Why do you sleep, O Lord?' (v. 24), is extraordinary: it attributes sleep to the Almighty, echoing and reversing Elijah's mockery of Baal on Carmel (1 Kings 18:27).*

Translation Friction: *The claim of innocence in verses 18-23 has troubled interpreters. Is the community genuinely innocent, or is this rhetorical exaggeration? The psalm leaves no room for ambiguity — the community explicitly denies covenant violation. This creates a theological crisis: if God is just and Israel is faithful, why the defeat? The psalm offers no answer; it simply holds the contradiction before God and demands a response. The phrase *be-kol yom* ('all day long') in verse 23 intensifies the suffering into a permanent condition. The historical setting is debated — some place it in the Assyrian period, others during the Maccabean crisis, but the psalm's refusal to name the enemy makes it available for any generation's suffering.*

Connections: *The protest of innocent suffering links this psalm to Job (especially Job 9:22-24, where Job accuses God of destroying the innocent alongside the wicked). The 'sheep for slaughter' image (v. 23) connects to Isaiah 53:7 (the suffering servant led like a lamb to slaughter). Paul's quotation in Romans 8:36 recontextualizes the verse: suffering is real but does not indicate divine abandonment. The plea for God to 'awake' (v. 24) inverts the mockery of 1 Kings 18:27, where Elijah tells Baal worshipers their god is sleeping. Here Israel dares to say the*

same to the LORD.

¹For the choirmaster. A maskil of the Sons of Korah.

²O God, with our ears we have heard —
our ancestors told us —
the deeds you performed in their days,
in the days of old.

³You — your hand drove out nations and planted our ancestors;
you shattered peoples and spread them out.

⁴For not by their own sword did they take the land,
and their own arm did not save them;
but your right hand and your arm
and the light of your face — because you delighted in them.

⁵You are my King, O God;
command victories for Jacob.

⁶Through you we gore our adversaries;
through your name we trample those who rise against us.

⁷For I do not trust in my bow,
and my sword cannot save me.

⁸For you have saved us from our adversaries
and put to shame those who hate us.

⁹In God we have gloried all day long,
and your name we will thank forever. Selah.

¹⁰Yet you have rejected us and humiliated us
and do not go out with our armies.

¹¹You make us retreat before the foe,
and those who hate us plunder at will.

¹²You hand us over like sheep for slaughter
and scatter us among the nations.

¹³You sell your people for nothing
and set no high price on them.

¹⁴You make us a taunt to our neighbors,
a mockery and derision to those around us.

¹⁵You make us a byword among the nations,
a shaking of the head among the peoples.

¹⁶All day long my disgrace is before me,
and shame covers my face,

¹⁷because of the voice of the one who taunts and reviles,
because of the enemy and the avenger.

¹⁸All this has come upon us,
yet we have not forgotten you
and we have not been false to your covenant.

¹⁹Our heart has not turned back,
nor have our steps strayed from your path,

²⁰yet you have crushed us in the haunt of jackals
and covered us with deep darkness.

²¹If we had forgotten the name of our God
or spread out our hands to a foreign god,

²²would not God search this out?
For he knows the secrets of the heart.

²³For your sake we are killed all day long;
we are counted as sheep for slaughter.

²⁴Awake! Why do you sleep, O Lord?
Rise up! Do not reject us forever.

²⁵Why do you hide your face?
Why forget our affliction and our oppression?

²⁶For our soul is bowed down to the dust;
our belly clings to the ground.

²⁷Rise up — come to our help!
Redeem us for the sake of your faithful love.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The maskil designation and Korahite attribution continue from Psalm 42. As a communal lament, this psalm would have been performed liturgically — the Sons of Korah are not merely named as authors but as the performing guild who gave voice to the nation's grief.
2. The psalm begins with oral tradition: be-oznenu shama'nu ('with our ears we have heard'). This is faith received by testimony, passed from generation to generation. The emphasis on hearing (not reading) places the community in the living chain of witness. The deeds (po'al) refer to the conquest and deliverance narratives. The appeal to 'days of old' (yeme qedem) establishes the contrast that drives the psalm: God acted then; why not now?
3. The agricultural metaphor is vivid: God uprooted nations (horashta, from yarash, 'to dispossess, to drive out') and planted (vattitta'em) Israel in their place. Israel is a vine planted in cleared land. The verb tara ('you shattered, you broke') is severe — God broke the peoples already in the land. The verbs alternate between planting Israel and removing the nations, creating a rhythmic pattern of displacement and establishment.
4. The phrase or panekha ('the light of your face') connects to the priestly blessing of Numbers 6:25 ('the LORD make his face shine upon you'). The shining face of God is the visible expression of divine favor — when it is present, victory follows; when it is withdrawn, defeat comes.
5. The singular malki ('my King') within a communal psalm may indicate a worship leader speaking on behalf of the congregation. The imperative tsavveh ('command!') treats God as a military commander who can order victories as a king dispatches troops. yeshu'ot Ya'aqov ('victories/salvations of Jacob') uses the plural of yeshu'ah, suggesting repeated or comprehensive deliverance.
6. The verb nenaggeach ('we gore') is a bull-fighting image — the horned animal thrusting its enemies. This is raw, physical language for military victory. The parallel be-shimkha ('through your name') means through the invocation of God's name in battle — the war cry that carries divine authority.

7. The confession *lo be-qashti evtach* ('not in my bow do I trust') uses the same verb *batach* ('to trust') that the psalms repeatedly reserve for confidence in God. Placing trust in weapons is the opposite of placing trust in God. The community explicitly disowns military self-reliance.
8. The perfect tense *hoshata'nu* ('you have saved us') recalls past deliverances. The verb *hevishota* ('you have put to shame') from *bosh* indicates public disgrace — God caused the enemies to suffer the humiliation they intended for Israel.
9. *hillalnu* ('we have gloried, we have praised') from *halal* is the root of 'hallelujah.' The community's boasting is in God, not in themselves — this prepares for the devastating reversal in the next verse. The *selah* marks a musical pause or interlude, allowing the contrast between past glory and present disaster to sink in.
10. The hinge word *af* ('yet, but, indeed') marks the devastating turn. *zanachta* ('you have rejected') and *vatakhliemnu* ('you have humiliated us') use the same verbs previously applied to enemies — now God does to Israel what he once did to their foes. The phrase *lo tetse be-tziv'otenu* ('you do not go out with our armies') is the core accusation: God has withdrawn from battle. In Israelite warfare theology, God marched with the army (cf. Deuteronomy 20:4). His absence means certain defeat.
11. Verse 11 continues the psalm's thematic and structural development.
12. *tson ma'akhal* ('sheep for eating/slaughter') is an image of helpless livestock led to death. The verb *zeritanu* ('you have scattered us') from *zarah* ('to scatter, to winnow') suggests exile — dispersion among the nations like grain flung into the wind.
13. The commercial metaphor of God 'selling' his people appears also in Judges 2:14, 3:8, and 4:2, where God 'sells' Israel into the hands of oppressors as punishment for idolatry. But here, the community insists they have not sinned (vv. 18-22) — so the sale is unjust, or at least inexplicable.
14. Verse 14 continues the psalm's thematic and structural development.
15. *mashal* ('byword, proverb') means Israel's name has become a cautionary tale — other nations use Israel as an example of ruin. *menod rosh* ('shaking of the head') is the gesture of contemptuous pity — people look at Israel and shake their heads in mockery.
16. Verse 16 continues the psalm's thematic and structural development.
17. Verse 17 continues the psalm's thematic and structural development.
18. The insistence on innocence distinguishes Psalm 44 from most other national laments, which typically include confession of sin (cf. Psalm 106, Daniel 9, Nehemiah 9). This community does not confess; it protests. The theological problem this creates — why does a faithful people suffer? — is left unresolved within the psalm itself.
19. Verse 19 continues the psalm's thematic and structural development.
20. *meqom tannim* ('place of jackals') suggests desolate ruins — jackals inhabit abandoned places. *tsalmavet* ('deep darkness, shadow of death') is a compound word debated among scholars. It may derive from *tsel* ('shadow') + *mavet* ('death') or from *tsalmut* ('deep darkness'). Either way, it describes the most extreme darkness imaginable — the darkness of Sheol, of death, of total divine absence.
21. Verse 21 continues the psalm's thematic and structural development.
22. The community appeals to divine omniscience as their witness. *ta'alumot lev* ('secrets of the heart') — if they had worshiped foreign gods even in thought, God would know. Their appeal to God's knowledge of hidden things is itself an act of radical transparency: they invite investigation and declare confidence in the outcome.
23. The phrase *ki alekha* ('for your sake, on account of you') is theologically central. The suffering is not random, not punitive, but vocational — it is the consequence of belonging to God in a hostile world. This reading anticipates the Christian theology of suffering for the sake of Christ and the Jewish theology of *kiddush hashem* (sanctification of the divine name through martyrdom).
24. Psalm 121:4 declares that 'the Guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps.' Psalm 44:24 takes that theological conviction and throws it back at God as a question: if you do not sleep, then explain why you are acting as though you do. The tension between these two psalms is not resolved — it is held in the canon as a witness to the full range of faithful prayer.
25. The hidden face (*hester panim*) is the opposite of the shining face (or *panim*) of verse 4. When God hides his face, favor is withdrawn and disaster follows. *onyenu ve-lachatsenu* ('our affliction and our oppression') — *oni* is suffering imposed from outside, *lachats* is pressure or crushing force. Both words carry the memory of Egypt (Exodus 3:9 uses both terms for Israel's condition under Pharaoh).
26. The image is prostration — not worship but collapse. *shachah le-afar nafshenu* ('our soul bows to the dust') and *davqah la-arets bitnenu* ('our belly sticks to the earth') describe a people face-down in the dirt, too broken to rise. The verb *davaq* ('to cling, to stick') is the same word used for marriage in Genesis 2:24 and for covenant loyalty — here it describes a body glued to the ground by despair.
27. The appeal *le-ma'an chasdekha* ('for the sake of your faithful love') is the psalm's last word on the subject. Having exhausted every argument — past faithfulness, present innocence, the absurdity of God sleeping — the community falls back on the one thing that cannot fail: God's own covenant character. If *chesed* means anything, it means God cannot abandon his people permanently.

45

Summary: *Psalm 45 is a royal wedding psalm — a song composed for the marriage of an Israelite king to a foreign princess. The poet begins by describing the king's beauty, grace, and martial valor (vv. 3-10), then addresses the bride, urging her to forget her homeland and embrace her new identity as the queen (vv. 11-13), and concludes with the procession of the bride into the palace and a promise of royal descendants (vv. 14-18). The superscription calls it a shir yedidot ('a song of love/beloved things'), the only psalm so designated.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 45 is the most explicitly messianic psalm in the Psalter after Psalm 2 and Psalm 110. In verse 7, the king is addressed as Elohim: 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever' (kis'akha Elohim olam va-ed). Whether Elohim here means 'God' (the king is being addressed as divine or as God's representative) or 'your divine throne' (an attributive use), the verse pushes the Davidic king toward divine status in a way unparalleled in Israelite literature. Hebrews 1:8-9 quotes this verse as proof of the Son's divinity. The psalm's other remarkable feature is its frank celebration of physical beauty, perfume, music, and royal splendor — the ivory palaces, the queen in gold of Ophir, the embroidered garments. This is a psalm that delights in material beauty as an expression of divine blessing, without a trace of ascetic suspicion.*

Translation Friction: *The address to the king as Elohim (v. 7) is the most debated crux in the psalm. Options include: (1) the king is addressed as 'God' in a court hyperbole reflecting ancient Near Eastern royal ideology; (2) Elohim is vocative but means 'divine one' or 'mighty one' rather than 'God' proper; (3) the text should be repointed to read 'your throne is God's throne' or 'God is your throne.' We retain the traditional vocative reading ('your throne, O God') because the Hebrew syntax most naturally supports it and because the psalm clearly operates within the ideology of the Davidic covenant, where the king is God's adopted son (Psalm 2:7). The identity of the bride is debated — Jezebel (Ahab's marriage), an Egyptian princess (Solomon's era), or a Tyrian princess (the 'daughter of Tyre' in v. 13) are all proposed.*

Connections: *The royal ideology connects to 2 Samuel 7 (the Davidic covenant), Psalm 2 (the king as God's son), and Psalm 110 (the priest-king at God's right hand). Hebrews 1:8-9 quotes verses 7-8 as addressed to Christ. The bride's instruction to 'forget your people and your father's house' (v. 11) echoes Genesis 12:1, where Abraham is told to leave his homeland — the bride's journey mirrors the patriarchal call. The 'daughter of Tyre' (v. 13) connects to Solomon's alliance with Hiram of Tyre (1 Kings 5) and to the broader theme of foreign nations bringing tribute to Zion (Isaiah 60:5-7). The myrrh, aloes, and cassia (v. 9) anticipate the spices of Song of Songs.*

¹For the choirmaster. Set to 'Lilies.' A maskil of the Sons of Korah. A song of love.

²My heart overflows with a good word;
I address my work to the king.
My tongue is the pen of a skilled scribe.

³You are the most handsome among the sons of humanity;
grace is poured upon your lips.
Therefore God has blessed you forever.

⁴Strap your sword on your thigh, O warrior —
your splendor and your majesty!

⁵In your majesty, ride out victoriously
for the cause of truth and humility and righteousness.
Let your right hand teach you awesome deeds.

⁶Your arrows are sharpened —
peoples fall beneath you —
into the heart of the king's enemies.

⁷Your throne, O God, is forever and ever;
a scepter of equity is the scepter of your kingdom.

⁸You love righteousness and hate wickedness;
therefore God, your God, has anointed you
with the oil of joy beyond your companions.

⁹Myrrh and aloes and cassia — all your garments.
From ivory palaces, strings make you glad.

¹⁰Daughters of kings are among your honored women;
the queen stands at your right hand in gold of Ophir.

¹¹Listen, daughter, and see, and turn your ear:
forget your people and your father's house.

¹²Then the king will desire your beauty,
for he is your lord — bow before him.

¹³The daughter of Tyre comes with a gift;
the wealthy of the people seek your favor.

¹⁴All glorious is the king's daughter within the palace;
her garment is woven with gold.

¹⁵In embroidered garments she is led to the king;
virgins, her companions, follow after her —
they are brought to you.

¹⁶They are led with gladness and rejoicing;
they enter the king's palace.

¹⁷In place of your fathers will be your sons;
you will appoint them as princes throughout the earth.

¹⁸I will cause your name to be remembered in every generation;
therefore the peoples will praise you forever and ever.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. *al shoshannim* ('set to Lilies') is a musical direction — likely the name of a tune or a reference to lily-shaped instruments. *shir yedidot* ('a song of beloved things / a song of love') is unique among psalm superscriptions. *yedidot* is the feminine plural of *yadid* ('beloved'), making this literally 'a song of beloved-ones' or 'a love song.' The term openly declares the psalm's genre: this is a wedding poem.
2. The verb *rachash* occurs only here in the Hebrew Bible. Cognate languages suggest 'to bubble, to stir, to be in commotion.' The poet's heart is not calmly composing but erupting with creative energy. This self-conscious poetic introduction is rare in the Psalms and signals a court composition of high literary ambition.
3. *yafafita* ('you are exceedingly beautiful') is an unusual *pilel* form of *yafah* ('to be beautiful'), intensifying the adjective — the king is beautiful beyond ordinary beauty. The phrase *hutsaq chen be-siftotekha* ('grace is poured on your lips') uses the imagery of liquid metal being poured into a mold (*yatsaq*, 'to pour, to cast'). The king's speech is not merely graceful but divinely crafted. The consequence: *al ken berakhekha Elohim le-olam* ('therefore God has blessed you forever') — physical beauty and verbal grace are read as evidence of permanent divine favor.
4. The poet shifts from beauty to battle. *chagor charbkha al yarekh gibbor* ('strap your sword on your thigh, mighty one') addresses the king as a warrior preparing for combat. *gibbor* ('mighty one, warrior, champion') is one of the divine titles in Isaiah 9:5 (El Gibbor). *hodekha va-hadarekha* ('your splendor and your majesty') describes the royal warrior's glory — *hod* and *hadar* are frequently paired as attributes of God (Psalm 96:6, 104:1), here

applied to the king.

5. The combination of military valor with humility (anvah) is surprising. The ideal Israelite king is not merely powerful but meek — a quality that will be central to the messianic portrait in Zechariah 9:9 ('humble, riding on a donkey'). This psalm holds together what later theology tends to separate: the warrior and the servant.
6. The Hebrew syntax is disrupted for dramatic effect: 'your arrows sharpened — peoples beneath you fall — in the heart of the king's enemies.' The middle phrase (peoples fall beneath you) is parenthetical, creating a vivid cinematic effect: arrows fly, nations collapse, and the arrows land in the enemies' hearts. The third-person reference to 'the king' within a second-person address may reflect court protocol.
7. Hebrews 1:8-9 quotes this verse as addressed to the Son, making it a foundational christological text. The author of Hebrews reads Elohim as a genuine divine address: the king to whom these words are spoken is, in the fullest sense, God. Whether the original psalmist intended this level of meaning or was working within ancient Near Eastern royal ideology that attributed semi-divine status to kings, the canonical reading — Israel's king as God's own embodiment of rule — reaches toward incarnational theology.
7. The alternative reading 'your throne is God's, forever and ever' (taking Elohim as a genitive rather than vocative) is grammatically possible but less natural in context. The parallel verse 8 ('therefore God, your God, has anointed you') uses Elohim twice in different senses, suggesting the psalmist is comfortable applying the word both to the king and to the God who anoints him.
8. mashach ('to anoint') is the root of mashiach ('messiah, anointed one'). The king is God's mashiach — anointed with oil as a sign of divine election. The 'oil of joy' (shemen sason) echoes Isaiah 61:3, where God gives 'the oil of joy instead of mourning' — anointing as the reversal of grief.
9. The three spices — mor (myrrh), ahalot (aloes), and qetsi'ot (cassia) — are luxury fragrances associated with royalty and love (Song of Songs 4:14). The king's garments are saturated with them. hekhlei shen ('ivory palaces') describe the royal residence — ivory-inlaid buildings like those of Ahab's 'ivory house' (1 Kings 22:39). The word minni (from which) likely introduces musical instruments — strings or harps from these palaces provide the wedding music.
10. shegal ('queen, consort') is an Aramaic loanword that appears rarely in Hebrew (here and in Nehemiah 2:6). It denotes the queen consort — the king's primary wife, distinct from secondary wives or concubines. Her position at the king's right hand mirrors the position of the king himself at God's right hand (Psalm 110:1).
11. The demand to 'forget your people' is not cruel but liturgical — the bride is entering a covenant that requires total reorientation. In the ancient Near East, a royal bride who married into a foreign court was expected to adopt the religion and customs of her new kingdom. The psalmist makes this expectation explicit.
12. yit'av ha-melekh yofyekh ('the king will desire your beauty') — the verb avah ('to desire, to long for') expresses the king's attraction to the bride. The statement ki hu adonayikh ('for he is your lord') establishes the marital authority of the husband in the ancient context. ve-hishtachavi lo ('and bow to him') — the bride is instructed to show reverence to the king, just as subjects bow before their sovereign. The dual role of husband and lord reflects the ancient Near Eastern fusion of domestic and political authority.
13. bat Tsor ('the daughter of Tyre') may refer to the city of Tyre personified, or to a Tyrian princess. Tyre was the premier commercial power of the eastern Mediterranean — its presence with tribute signals that the queen commands international respect. The phrase ashire am ('the wealthy of the people') seek her face (panayikh yechallu, literally 'they entreat your face'). The bride has become a figure of power.
14. kevuddah (feminine of kavod, 'glory') is used of the bride. kavod is typically reserved for God's glory or the glory of kings — its application to the bride elevates her to a status parallel with royalty and divinity. The gold-woven garment connects to the high priest's ephod, creating a subtle link between the queen and the priestly office.
15. The bridal procession moves from the preparation chambers to the king's presence. lirqamot ('in embroidered work') describes the ornate garments. betulot achareyha re'oteyha ('virgins behind her, her companions') form the bridal retinue — young women who attend the bride in her procession. The shift from third person ('she is led') to second person ('brought to you') brings the reader suddenly into the king's perspective.
16. Verse 16 continues the psalm's thematic and structural development.
17. The address returns to the king. tachat avotekha yihyu vanekha ('in place of your fathers will be your sons') — the dynasty will continue, the sons replacing the ancestors as rulers. teshitemo le-sarim be-khol ha-arets ('you will set them as princes in all the earth') extends the dynasty's rule beyond Israel to universal dominion. This is Davidic covenant language at its most expansive, pointing toward the messianic vision of worldwide rule.
18. The poet's claim to immortalize the king's name is itself a form of prophetic speech — the psalm has in fact preserved this king's memory for three thousand years. The shift from 'your sons will rule' (v. 17) to 'peoples will praise you forever' (v. 18) moves from dynastic politics to cosmic worship, making the psalm a bridge between history and eschatology.

46

Summary: *Psalm 46 is a song of Zion and a psalm of confidence attributed to the Sons of Korah. It celebrates God as a refuge and strength in the face of cosmic chaos — mountains falling into the sea, waters roaring, nations raging. The psalm is structured in three strophes: God as refuge amid natural catastrophe (vv. 2-4), God's presence protecting the holy city (vv. 5-8), and God as the one who ends war and commands stillness (vv. 9-12). The refrain 'The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold' appears twice (vv. 8, 12) and was likely also sung after verse 4.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This psalm inspired Martin Luther's hymn 'A Mighty Fortress Is Our God' (Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott), making it one of the most influential psalms in Western history. The command harpu u-de'u ki anokhi Elohim ('be still and know that I am God,' v. 11) is among the most quoted lines in Scripture, though its meaning is frequently softened. harpu is not 'relax' or 'be quiet' — it means 'let go, cease striving, drop your weapons, stop.' It is addressed to the warring nations, not to anxious believers: God commands the earth's armies to stand down. The 'river whose streams make glad the city of God' (v. 5) is remarkable because Jerusalem has no river. The image is theological, not geographical — it evokes the river of Eden (Genesis 2:10), the waters flowing from the Temple (Ezekiel 47:1-12), and the river of life (Revelation 22:1-2).*

Translation Friction: *The superscription al alamot ('according to alamot') is debated — alamot may mean 'young women' (indicating soprano voices or a women's choir), 'hidden things,' or a musical mode. The 'river' of verse 5 has no geographical referent in Jerusalem, which relies on the Gihon spring and Hezekiah's tunnel. The river must be symbolic: God's presence itself is the water supply that makes the city flourish when earthly rivers fail. The refrain after verse 4 is not present in the MT but is inferred from the psalm's structure; some scholars insert 'YHVH Tseva'ot immanu' there to create three balanced strophes. The phrase elohim be-qirbah ('God is in her midst') uses feminine language for the city, treating Zion as a woman with God dwelling within her.*

Connections: *The chaos-waters imagery (vv. 3-4) connects to Genesis 1:2 (tehom), Psalm 93 (the floods lift up), and Nahum 1:4 (God rebuking the sea). The river of God (v. 5) echoes Genesis 2:10, Ezekiel 47:1-12, Joel 3:18, and Zechariah 14:8 — all depicting life-giving water flowing from God's dwelling. The Zion theology links to Psalms 48, 76, 84, 87, and 122. God making wars cease (v. 10) echoes Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3 (beating swords into plowshares). The command 'be still' (v. 11) anticipates the divine warrior's silencing of all opposition at the eschaton.*

¹For the choirmaster. Of the Sons of Korah. According to alamot. A song.

²God is our refuge and strength,
a help in troubles — found to be very near.

³Therefore we will not fear,
though the earth gives way,
though the mountains topple into the heart of the seas,

⁴though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains quake at its surging. Selah.

⁵A river — its streams make glad the city of God,
the holy dwelling of the Most High.

⁶God is in her midst — she will not be shaken;
God will help her at the break of dawn.

⁷Nations rage, kingdoms totter;
he lifts his voice — the earth melts.

⁸The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our stronghold. Selah.

⁹Come, see the works of the LORD —
what desolations he has set upon the earth.

¹⁰He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the chariots with fire.

¹¹Let go and know that I am God.
I will be exalted among the nations;
I will be exalted in the earth.

¹²The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our stronghold. Selah.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. al alamot ('according to alamot') likely refers to a musical setting. alamot may derive from almah ('young woman'), suggesting performance by soprano voices or a women's choir. Alternatively, it may be a technical term for a high-pitched musical mode. We leave it transliterated as a musical direction whose precise meaning is uncertain.
2. machaseh ('refuge') appears 20 times in the Psalms, more than in any other book. It comes from chasah ('to seek refuge, to take shelter') — the same word used of birds sheltering their young under their wings. God-as-refuge is one of the Psalter's master metaphors.
2. Luther's 'A Mighty Fortress Is Our God' paraphrases this verse. The German Ein feste Burg captures machaseh as a fortification — a castle, a stronghold. The Hebrew image is broader: any place of shelter from danger.
3. The consequence of God-as-refuge is fearlessness in the face of cosmic dissolution. be-hamir arets ('when the earth changes/gives way') uses mur ('to change, to exchange, to shake') — the solid ground itself becomes unstable. u-ve-mot harim be-lev yammim ('and when mountains slip into the heart of the seas') — the most permanent features of the landscape collapse into the most chaotic element. This is creation running backward: the mountains that emerged from the waters in Genesis 1 return to them. And still: lo nira ('we will not fear').
4. Three verbs describe the chaos-waters: yehemu ('they roar/rage,' from hamah), yechmeru ('they foam/surge,' from chamar, 'to boil, to ferment'), and yir'ashu ('they quake/shake,' from ra'ash). The sea's ga'avah ('pride, swelling, arrogance') makes the mountains themselves tremble. The selah here likely marks the place where the refrain was originally sung: 'The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold.'
5. The contrast between the raging seas (vv. 3-4) and the gladness-giving river (v. 5) is the psalm's central image. Chaos waters threaten from without; the river of God sustains from within. The city has an internal water supply that no external catastrophe can destroy — because the water is God's presence itself.
6. Elohim be-qirbah ('God is in her midst') — the feminine pronoun refers to the city. Zion is personified as a woman with God dwelling inside her. bal timmot ('she will not be shaken') — the verb mot ('to totter, to shake, to slip') was used of the mountains in verse 3. The mountains topple, but the city does not — because its stability comes from God within, not from geological firmness. lifnot boqer ('at the turning of the morning') — God's help arrives at dawn, the moment when darkness breaks. Dawn in the Hebrew Bible is the traditional time of divine intervention and military deliverance (Exodus 14:27; 2 Kings 19:35).
7. The parallel structure between vv. 3-4 (nature chaos) and v. 7 (political chaos) is the psalm's central literary device. Both use the same vocabulary: hamah (roar/rage), mot (shake/totter). The message: cosmic upheaval and geopolitical upheaval are equally powerless before God's voice.
8. YHVH Tseva'ot ('LORD of hosts') is one of the most frequent divine titles in the prophets (especially Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the post-exilic prophets). Tseva'ot refers to armies — whether heavenly armies (angels, stars) or Israel's earthly forces. The title declares God's supreme military authority over all powers visible and invisible.
9. The invitation lekhu chazu ('come, look, behold') summons the congregation to witness God's acts. mi'alot YHVH ('the works of the LORD') can mean either acts of judgment or acts of deliverance — here, specifically shammat ('desolations, devastations'). God has devastated — but the devastation is directed at the threatening powers, not at his people. The 'desolations' are the ruins of enemy war-making, which God has destroyed.

10. The vision of universal peace through divine action connects to Isaiah 2:4 / Micah 4:3 ('they shall beat their swords into plowshares') and Hosea 2:18 ('I will break the bow and the sword and war from the land'). The difference is method: in Isaiah, the nations voluntarily disarm; in Psalm 46, God forcibly destroys their weapons. Both envision the same end — world without war — but by different means.
11. harpu is frequently sentimentalized in devotional use as 'be still' in the sense of quiet meditation. The Hebrew is more forceful: it is God commanding hostile powers to cease their activity. The stillness God demands is not contemplative peace but military surrender. The nations are to drop their weapons and acknowledge that the LORD alone is God. This does not exclude a devotional application — there is genuine comfort in knowing that God commands the powers to stop — but the primary audience is the hostile world, not the anxious believer.
11. We render harpu as 'let go' rather than 'be still' to preserve the active, volitional force of the command. The nations must release their grip on power, ambition, and war.
12. The refrain returns identically, sealing the psalm. After the cosmic chaos of verses 3-4, after the political chaos of verse 7, and after God's silencing of all opposition in verses 10-11, the community repeats its core confession: God is with us. The word immanu ('with us') carries the entire psalm's theology in two syllables.

47

Summary: *Psalm 47 is a brief, exuberant enthronement psalm of the Sons of Korah celebrating God's kingship over all the earth. The psalm opens with a call for all peoples to clap their hands and shout, declares God as the Most High and great King, and culminates in God ascending his throne amid shouts and the blast of the shofar. The nations gather as the people of the God of Abraham, and God is exalted as ruler over all.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 47 is the primary psalm associated with Rosh Hashanah in Jewish liturgy — it is recited seven times before the shofar blasts. The psalm's universalism is striking: it does not merely claim that God rules Israel but that all peoples (kol ha-ammim) are summoned to praise him, and that the nobles of the peoples gather as the people of the God of Abraham (v. 10). The promise to Abraham that 'in you all the families of the earth will be blessed' (Genesis 12:3) finds liturgical expression here. The phrase alah Elohim bitru'ah ('God has gone up with a shout,' v. 6) envisions a divine enthronement procession — God ascending to his throne like a king entering his palace. In Christian liturgy, this verse was applied to the Ascension of Christ.*

Translation Friction: *The term Elyon ('Most High,' v. 3) is an ancient Canaanite divine title adopted into Israelite theology (cf. Genesis 14:18-20, Deuteronomy 32:8). Its use here reinforces God's supremacy over all peoples and all other claimed deities. The phrase am Elohe Avraham ('the people of the God of Abraham,' v. 10) rather than 'the people of God' or 'Israel' is deliberate — Abraham is the patriarch of many nations (Genesis 17:4-5), not just Israel. The inclusion of 'nobles of the peoples' (nedive ammin) in God's people pushes past ethnic boundaries. The verb alah ('to go up,' v. 6) may reflect a liturgical ritual in which the Ark of the Covenant was carried up to the Temple mount, symbolizing God's enthronement.*

Connections: *The enthronement psalms (47, 93, 95-99) share the declaration 'The LORD reigns' (or its equivalent). Psalm 47 connects to Psalm 24:7-10 (the gates lifting for the King of glory), to Psalm 68:19 (God ascending on high), and to the Sinai theophany (Exodus 19:16-19) with its shofar blasts. The gathering of nations echoes Isaiah 2:2-3, where all nations stream to Zion. Paul's argument in Romans 4 that Abraham is the father of all who believe, not merely of circumcised Jews, follows the trajectory this psalm begins.*

¹For the choirmaster. A psalm of the Sons of Korah.

²All you peoples, clap your hands!
Shout to God with a voice of ringing joy!

³For the LORD, the Most High, is awesome —
a great King over all the earth.

⁴He subdues peoples under us
and nations beneath our feet.

⁵He chooses our inheritance for us —
the pride of Jacob whom he loves. Selah.

⁶God has gone up with a shout,
the LORD with the blast of a ram's horn!

⁷Sing praise to God — sing praise!
Sing praise to our King — sing praise!

⁸For God is King of all the earth;
sing praise with a maskil!

⁹God reigns over the nations;
God sits on his holy throne.

¹⁰The nobles of the peoples have gathered
as the people of the God of Abraham,
for the shields of the earth belong to God —
he is greatly exalted.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Verse 1 continues the psalm's thematic and structural development.
2. The universalism of kol ha-ammim ('all the peoples') is not hypothetical — it is an imperative. The psalm commands all nations to worship, not merely predicts that they will. This is a bold liturgical claim: the God of Israel deserves the worship of every human community.
3. Three titles accumulate: YHVH ('the LORD' — the covenant name), Elyon ('Most High' — supreme over all), and nora ('awesome, fearsome, to be dreaded'). melekh gadol al kol ha-arets ('a great king over all the earth') is the enthronement declaration — God is not merely Israel's king but the king of the entire world. The title 'great king' (melekh gadol) echoes the Assyrian royal title sharru rabu, deliberately claiming for Israel's God the supremacy that earthly empires claimed for their rulers.
4. yadber ammin tachtenu ('he subdues peoples under us') uses davar in its rare sense of 'to drive, to subdue, to lead' (cf. Deuteronomy 33:3). The image is of conquest — but conquest achieved by God, not by Israel's military. The nations under Israel's feet reflects the ancient Near Eastern image of a conqueror placing his foot on the neck of the defeated (cf. Joshua 10:24).
5. nachalatenu ('our inheritance') refers to the promised land, given as a permanent possession. ge'on Ya'akov ('the pride/excellency of Jacob') likely refers to the land of Israel or to the Temple — the thing that makes Jacob's descendants distinct and honored. asher ahav ('whom he loved') — God's choice of this inheritance is rooted in love, not obligation.
6. In Jewish liturgy, this verse grounds the practice of blowing the shofar on Rosh Hashanah — the day traditionally understood as the anniversary of God's enthronement as King. The psalm is recited seven times before the shofar blasts begin.
6. Christian liturgy applied this verse to the Ascension of Christ (Acts 1:9-11), reading the ascending God as the risen Lord returning to his heavenly throne. The early church fathers (particularly Augustine and Chrysostom) commented extensively on this connection.
7. The fourfold repetition of zammeru ('sing praise!') is the psalm's ecstatic center. The verb zamar ('to sing, to make music') appears four times in rapid succession, creating a cascade of praise. The shift from Elohim ('God') to malkenu ('our King') in the parallel lines identifies God as Israel's personal sovereign — not merely the cosmic king but our king.
8. melekh kol ha-arets ('king of all the earth') restates the universal claim of verse 3. zammeru maskil ('sing a maskil') — the maskil here may mean 'sing with understanding/skill' or 'sing an instructive song.' The five-fold occurrence of zamar in verses 7-8 (four imperatives plus this one) is unprecedented in the Psalter.
9. The declaration malakh Elohim ('God reigns/has become king') echoes the enthronement shout YHVH malakh ('the LORD reigns') in Psalms 93:1, 96:10, 97:1, and 99:1. This formula is the theological heart of the enthronement psalm genre.
10. The identification of the gathered nations as am Elohe Avraham ('the people of the God of Abraham') rather than 'the people of Israel' is theologically significant. Abraham is the father of many nations (Genesis 17:5), not only of Israel. This psalm envisions the nations entering Abraham's covenant family — a vision that Paul will develop in Romans 4 and Galatians 3.

10. *maginne erets* ('shields of the earth') is an unusual phrase. *magen* can mean 'shield' (a defensive weapon) or 'patron, protector' (a metaphorical usage). If it means 'patrons/rulers,' the verse says earth's rulers belong to God. If 'shields,' the verse says earth's defenses are God's property. Either reading reinforces God's sovereignty.

48

Summary: *Psalm 48 is a Song of Zion attributed to the Sons of Korah, celebrating the beauty, strength, and divine protection of Jerusalem. The psalm opens with praise for God's greatness revealed in the holy mountain, describes the panic and flight of enemy kings who saw the city and were terrified, invites worshipers to walk around Zion counting its towers, and concludes with the declaration that this God will be our guide forever.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 48 transforms geography into theology. Mount Zion is described as *yefe nof mesos kol ha-arets* ('beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth,' v. 3), and then astonishingly identified as *yarkhete tsafon* ('the far reaches of the north'). *Tsafon* is Mount Zaphon, the mountain of the gods in Canaanite mythology — the Olympus of the ancient Near East, where Baal was enthroned. The psalm takes the name of the pagan divine mountain and applies it to Zion: the real Mount Zaphon is not in Syria; it is in Jerusalem. This is theological conquest by renaming — the psalm claims for YHWH and his city the cosmic significance that Canaanite religion attributed to Baal and his mountain. The kings who approach Zion in verses 5-7 do not even fight; they see the city and flee in terror, seized by trembling like a woman in labor. The city itself, without lifting a sword, defeats its enemies by the sheer force of God's presence within it.*

Translation Friction: *The identification of Zion with *tsafon* ('north') has generated much scholarly discussion. Zion is not geographically in the north; it is in the south of Israel. *tsafon* here functions as a mythological name, not a compass direction. The psalm appropriates Canaanite sacred geography for Israelite theology. The historical event behind the kings' panic (vv. 5-7) is debated — proposals include Sennacherib's failed siege of Jerusalem in 701 BCE (2 Kings 18-19), the coalition defeat in the Valley of Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 20), or a purely idealized/eschatological scenario. The phrase *shivvartem be-ruach qadim* ('you shattered them with an east wind,' v. 8) connects to the Exodus (Exodus 14:21) and to the destruction of Tarshish-ships (trade vessels), suggesting God's power over both military and commercial empires.*

Connections: *The Song of Zion genre links Psalm 48 to Psalms 46, 76, 84, 87, and 122. The identification with Mount Zaphon connects to Isaiah 14:13 (the king of Babylon's ambition to sit on 'the mount of assembly in the far north') and to Ezekiel 28:14 (the cherub on 'the holy mountain of God'). The kings' terror echoes Exodus 15:14-16 (the nations trembling at the Exodus) and Joshua 2:9-11 (Rahab's testimony that Canaan's inhabitants melted with fear). The instruction to 'walk about Zion' (v. 13) connects to the pilgrim psalms and to the processional liturgy of the Temple festivals.*

¹A song — A psalm of the Sons of Korah.

²Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised
in the city of our God, his holy mountain.

³Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth,
is Mount Zion, the heights of Zaphon —
the city of the great King.

⁴God in her citadels
has made himself known as a stronghold.

⁵For look — the kings assembled;
they advanced together.

⁶They saw — and at once they were stunned;
they were terrified; they fled in panic.

⁷Trembling seized them there —
anguish like a woman in labor.

⁸With an east wind
you shatter the ships of Tarshish.

⁹in the city of the LORD of hosts,
As we have heard, so we have seen
in the city of our God —
God will establish her forever. Selah.

¹⁰We have pondered your faithful love, O God,
in the midst of your Temple.

¹¹As your name, O God, so your praise
reaches to the ends of the earth.
Your right hand is filled with righteousness.

¹²May Mount Zion rejoice;
let the daughters of Judah be glad
because of your judgments.

¹³Walk around Zion; encircle her;
count her towers.

¹⁴Set your hearts on her ramparts;
examine her citadels,
so that you may tell the next generation:

¹⁵For this God is our God forever and ever;
he will guide us beyond death.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Verse 1 continues the psalm's thematic and structural development.
2. gadol YHVH u-mehullal me'od ('great is the LORD and much to be praised') opens with the adjective gadol ('great') placed first for emphasis. The location of this praise is specific: be-ir Elohenu har qodsho ('in the city of our God, his holy mountain'). God's greatness is not abstract — it is localized in Zion, the place where heaven touches earth.
3. We render tsafon as 'Zaphon' rather than 'north' to preserve the mythological reference. The psalmist is not saying Zion is in the north (it is not); he is saying Zion is the true Zaphon — the real mountain of divine presence. This is a deliberate act of theological appropriation.
3. melek rav ('great king') is the Hebrew equivalent of the Akkadian sharru rabu, the standard title of the Assyrian emperor. The psalm claims this title for God, making the political point that the true great king is not in Nineveh but in Zion.
4. be-armenoteyha ('in her citadels/palaces') — the feminine suffix refers to the city. armenot are the fortified towers and palace-fortresses of the city. God is known (noda, from yada, 'to know') as a misgav ('stronghold, high fortress') — the same word used in Psalm 46:8, 12. The fortification of the city is not its walls but its God.
5. ki hinneh ('for behold') signals a dramatic shift to narrative. ha-melakhim no'adu ('the kings assembled') — multiple kings gathered for a coordinated attack. avru yachdav ('they advanced together') — they moved in concert toward the city. The brevity of the verse creates suspense: the kings have assembled, they have advanced — and then what?

6. The pattern — enemies approach, see, and flee — echoes the Exodus tradition (Exodus 15:14-16), where the nations heard of God's deliverance and trembled. In both cases, God's reputation or visible presence does the fighting.
7. re'adah ('trembling') from ra'ad ('to tremble') describes uncontrollable shaking. chil kayyoleadah ('writhing like a woman giving birth') — chil ('pain, writhing, anguish') is the specific word for labor pains. The warrior-kings are reduced to the helplessness of a woman in the grip of contractions — an image that simultaneously conveys pain, loss of control, and the irresistibility of the force acting upon them.
8. ruach qadim ('east wind') is the sirocco — the hot, destructive wind from the desert that withers crops and shatters structures. In the Exodus, God used the east wind to part the sea (Exodus 14:21) and to bring locusts (Exodus 10:13). oniyot Tarshish ('ships of Tarshish') were the largest merchant vessels of the ancient world, capable of long Mediterranean voyages. Tarshish is likely Tartessus in Spain — the farthest reach of Phoenician commerce. God's east wind destroys the mightiest commercial fleet, demonstrating power over both military and economic empires.
9. The phrase 'as we heard, so we have seen' bridges the gap between tradition and experience. Faith is not merely receiving testimony about past events but encountering the same God in present experience. The psalm's theology of Zion is not nostalgic — it is experiential.
10. dimninu ('we have compared, we have pondered, we have meditated') from damah ('to be like, to compare, to liken') suggests deep reflection — the worshipers sit in the Temple and contemplate (literally 'form images of') God's chesed ('faithful love'). The setting is be-qerev hekhalekha ('in the midst of your palace/Temple') — the Temple is the place where faithful love is most clearly perceived.
11. ke-shimkha Elohim ken tehillatekha ('as your name, so your praise') — God's reputation (shem) matches the praise offered to him. The scope is al qatsve erets ('to the ends of the earth') — universal. tsedek mal'ah yeminekha ('your right hand is full of righteousness') — the right hand that wields power is filled not with violence but with tsedek ('righteousness, justice'). Power and justice are inseparable in God.
12. benot Yehudah ('daughters of Judah') refers to the towns and villages of Judah personified as women — 'daughters' in the sense of subsidiary settlements dependent on the mother-city, Jerusalem. Their gladness is grounded in mishpatekha ('your judgments') — God's judicial decisions that set things right. When God judges, the vulnerable celebrate.
13. The psalm shifts to a pilgrimage instruction: sobbu Tsiyon ve-haqqifuha ('go around Zion and encircle her'). This may reflect an actual liturgical procession around the city walls. sifru migdaleyha ('count her towers') — the worshipers are invited to inventory the city's defenses, not to trust in them but to witness the God-protected city's completeness. Every tower standing is evidence of divine preservation.
14. shitu libbekhem le-chelah ('set your hearts/minds on her ramparts') — chelah ('rampart, outer wall') is the defensive perimeter. The instruction is not military inspection but theological witness: look carefully, remember, and pass it on. le-ma'an tesapperu le-dor acharon ('so that you may recount to the next generation') — the purpose of the pilgrimage-tour is transmission. What you have seen with your eyes, you must speak to your children.
15. The phrase al mut is one of the most contested readings in the Psalter. The Masoretic accents separate it from the preceding word, suggesting it may be a postscript or musical notation. We render it as 'beyond death' because the psalm's theology of God's eternal faithfulness (olam va-ed) naturally extends past the boundary of human mortality. The God who is 'ours forever' does not stop guiding at the grave.

49

Summary: *Psalm 49 is a wisdom psalm of the Sons of Korah that confronts the mystery of death's equality — the rich and the poor, the wise and the foolish, all die. The psalm opens with a universal summons to hear wisdom, then exposes the folly of trusting in wealth: no amount of money can ransom a person from death. The rich and the foolish perish alike, their graves become their permanent homes, and their wealth passes to others. A key refrain declares that humanity in its pomp will not endure — like the beasts, they perish. Yet the psalmist expresses a singular hope: 'God will ransom my soul from the hand of Sheol, for he will take me.'*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 49 is the Hebrew Bible's most sustained meditation on the inability of wealth to defeat death, making it a biblical counterpart to Ecclesiastes. The refrain adam biqar ve-lo yavin nimshal ka-behemot nidmu ('humanity in its splendor without understanding is like the beasts that perish,' vv. 13, 21) reduces the wealthy to animals — all their glory cannot make them more than creatures who die and decompose. But verse 16 breaks through the psalm's bleak equality with a startling hope: akh Elohim yifdeh nafshi mi-yad She'ol ki yiqqacheni ('but God will ransom my soul from the hand of Sheol, for he will take me'). The verb laqach ('to take') is the same used for Enoch (Genesis 5:24, 'God took him') and Elijah (2 Kings 2:3, 'the LORD will take your master'). This is the Hebrew Bible's most explicit assertion of a hope beyond death for the righteous individual — not merely prolonged life, but rescue from Sheol itself.*

Translation Friction: The text of Psalm 49 is notoriously difficult, with several verses that resist easy translation. The refrain varies slightly between verses 13 and 21 (yalin vs. yavin — 'will not abide' vs. 'does not understand'), and scholars debate which is original and which a corruption. Verse 15 (Hebrew) is extremely compressed: qirbam battemo le-olam ('their inward thought is that their houses are forever') reconstructs what may be a corrupted text. The hope of verse 16 is the psalm's theological problem: how can the psalmist claim rescue from Sheol when the rest of the psalm insists that all die? The answer may lie in the distinction between death (which all share) and Sheol's power (from which God can ransom).

Connections: The wisdom framework connects to Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes, all of which address wealth's inability to secure life. The verb laqach in verse 16 ('he will take me') links to the Enoch tradition (Genesis 5:24) and the Elijah tradition (2 Kings 2:10). Psalm 73:23-26 develops the same hope: 'You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory.' Jesus' parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:16-21) and his teaching that a person cannot serve God and money (Matthew 6:24) echo this psalm's central argument. The refrain's comparison of wealthy humans to perishing beasts inverts Genesis 1:26-28, where humanity is given dominion over the animals — here, without wisdom, humans become indistinguishable from them.

¹For the choirmaster. A psalm of the Sons of Korah.

²Hear this, all you peoples;
give ear, all who inhabit the passing world.

³Both common folk and the highborn,
rich and poor together.

⁴My mouth will speak wisdom,
and the meditation of my heart will be understanding.

⁵I will turn my ear to a proverb;
I will open my riddle on the lyre.

⁶Why should I fear in days of trouble,
when the guilt of those who track me surrounds me?

⁷Those who trust in their wealth
and boast in the abundance of their riches —

⁸No one can ransom a brother
or pay God the price of his release,

⁹for the ransom of a life is too costly —
he must let it go forever.

¹⁰that he should live on forever
and never see the pit.

¹¹For he sees that the wise die;
the fool and the senseless alike perish
and leave their wealth to others.

¹²Their graves are their homes forever,
their dwelling places for all generations,
though they named lands after themselves.

¹³Humanity in its splendor will not endure;
it is like the beasts that perish.

¹⁴This is their way — their foolish confidence;
and those who follow them approve their words. Selah.

¹⁵Like sheep they are driven to Sheol;
death is their shepherd.
The upright will rule over them at morning,
and their form will waste away —
Sheol will be their dwelling, not a mansion.

¹⁶But God will ransom my life from the hand of Sheol,
for he will take me. Selah.

¹⁷Do not fear when a man grows rich,
when the glory of his house increases,

¹⁸for when he dies he will take nothing with him;
his glory will not follow him down.

¹⁹Though he blesses himself during his life,
and people praise you when you prosper,

²⁰he will go to the generation of his ancestors;
they will never see light.

²¹Humanity in its splendor, without understanding,
is like the beasts that perish.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Verse 1 continues the psalm's thematic and structural development.
2. The summons is universal: kol ha-ammim ('all the peoples') and kol yoshve chaled ('all who inhabit chaled'). The word chaled ('world, age, duration') is rare and emphasizes the transitory nature of earthly existence — from a root meaning 'to glide, to pass away.' The world itself is described by a word that means 'the fleeting thing.' The psalm addresses all of humanity, not just Israel.
3. bene adam ('sons of Adam/humanity') refers to ordinary people — the common person. bene ish ('sons of a man/person of standing') refers to those of higher social rank. The pairing covers the entire social spectrum, then further specifies: ashir ve-eyon ('rich and destitute'). The psalm addresses everyone without exception — its wisdom applies regardless of status or wealth.
4. khokhmot ('wisdoms,' plural) — the plural may indicate comprehensive wisdom, wisdom in its full range. hagut libbi ('the meditation/murmuring of my heart') uses hagah, the same verb from Psalm 1:2 for meditating on Torah. tevnnot ('understandings,' plural) parallels the plural of wisdom. The psalmist claims prophetic and sapiential authority: what follows is not opinion but divinely informed wisdom.
5. The combination of mashal ('proverb') and chidah ('riddle') echoes Proverbs 1:6, where both terms describe the content of wisdom. A chidah is not a puzzle for entertainment but a deep truth concealed in paradox — the kind of truth that requires meditation to unlock.
6. The verse is textually difficult. avon aqevai ('the iniquity of my heels/my supplanters') may mean: (1) the guilt of my own missteps, (2) the wickedness of those who pursue me (aqev as 'heel-tracker,' cf. Jacob's name), or (3) the sins that dog my footsteps. The context — a psalm about the futility of wealth — suggests the psalmist asks why he should fear when surrounded by the wickedness of the wealthy who oppress him.
7. ha-botchim al chelam ('those who trust in their resources') — the verb batach ('to trust') is the word the psalms reserve for confidence in God. Using it for wealth is a pointed accusation: they have placed in money the trust that belongs to God alone. u-ve-rov oshram yithallalu ('and in the greatness of their riches they boast') — the verb halal ('to boast, to praise') is also worship language. They praise their wealth as others praise God.
8. The verb padah ('to redeem, to ransom') is covenantal language — God ransoms (podeh) Israel from Egypt, from exile, from Sheol. The psalm's devastating point is that what humans cannot do for each other, God can do — setting up the hope of verse 16.

9. *yeqar pidyon nafsham* ('costly is the redemption of their soul/life') — *yeqar* means 'precious, expensive, rare.' The ransom price for a human life exceeds all possible payment. *ve-chadal le-olam* ('and he ceases forever') — the verb *chadal* ('to cease, to desist, to give up') means the would-be redeemer must abandon the attempt. No amount of wealth reaches the price of a life.
10. The purpose clause completes the thought: no one can pay enough to live forever (*yichi od lanestsach*) or to avoid the *shachat* ('pit, grave, corruption'). *shachat* can mean the physical grave or the decomposition of the body — death in its most unsparing form.
11. Death's equality is stated bluntly: *chakhamim yamuthu* ('the wise die'), and *yachad kesil u-va'ar yovedu* ('together the fool and the brute perish'). The three categories — wise, foolish, and brutish — cover the entire spectrum of human intelligence. None is exempt. *ve-azvu la-acherim chelam* ('and they leave their wealth to others') — the final insult. The wealth they spent their lives accumulating passes to people they may not have chosen.
12. The emendation of *qirbam* ('their inner thought') to *qivram* ('their grave') is widely accepted, as the *resh* and *bet* are visually similar in Hebrew script. The MT reading ('their inner thought is that their houses will last forever') makes sense but is less poetically parallel. Either way, the irony is sharp: they planned permanence and received a tomb.
13. The refrain in verse 21 will change one word: *yalin* ('abide') becomes *yavin* ('understand'). The shift is significant — the first refrain says wealth does not make you permanent; the second says wealth does not make you wise. Together they strip wealth of both its promises: durability and meaning.
14. *kesel* ('folly, false confidence, stupidity') is their fundamental error — trusting in wealth. *ve-achareihem be-fihem yirtsu* ('and those after them delight in their mouth/words') — subsequent generations repeat the same folly, approving the worldview of the rich who came before them. The cycle of foolish confidence reproduces itself.
15. The image of death as shepherd (*mavet yir'em*) is a deliberate inversion of Psalm 23 (*YHVH ro'i*, 'the LORD is my shepherd'). Those who refuse God as shepherd get death as shepherd instead. The 'morning' (*boqer*) of reversal echoes the dawn deliverance motif of Psalm 46:6.
16. The *selah* after this verse provides a moment of silence for the most radical claim in the psalm. After twelve verses insisting that all die, that no ransom suffices, that humans perish like beasts — this verse says: but not me. Not because of my wealth or wisdom, but because God ransoms. The basis is not human merit but divine action.
16. The echo of *padah* from verse 8 is deliberate. The psalm sets up an impossibility (no human can ransom) and then resolves it with divine capability (God can ransom). The structure mirrors the gospel pattern: what is impossible for humans is possible for God.
17. The practical application of the psalm's wisdom: *al tira* ('do not fear') — do not be intimidated or envious when others accumulate wealth. *kevod beto* ('the glory of his house') — the impressive display of a wealthy household. The psalm's message: this glory is temporary and ultimately powerless against death.
18. *lo be-moto yiqqach hakkol* ('not in his death will he take everything') — the verb *laqach* ('to take') reappears. In verse 16, God takes the psalmist; here, the rich man cannot take his possessions. The contrast is devastating: the righteous are taken by God; the wealthy cannot take their goods. *lo yered acharav kevodo* ('his glory will not descend after him') — *kavod* ('glory, weight, substance') stays above ground while the body descends to the grave.
19. *nafsho be-chayyav yevarekh* ('he blesses his soul during his life') — self-congratulation, the rich man telling himself how well he has done. *ve-yodukha ki tetiv lakh* ('and they praise you when you do well for yourself') — others affirm and celebrate your success. The psalm exposes the feedback loop of wealth: prosperity generates self-praise and social approval, creating the illusion of permanence.
20. *tavo ad dor avotav* ('he will come to the generation of his fathers') — he will join his dead ancestors in *Sheol*. *ad netsach lo yir'u* or ('unto perpetuity they will not see light') — the finality is total: the light that the psalm promised to the righteous (at morning, v. 15) is denied forever to those who trusted in wealth. The contrast with verse 16 is sharp: the psalmist will be taken by God; the wealthy will never see light.
21. The two forms of the refrain together deliver the psalm's complete message. Verse 13: wealth does not make you last. Verse 21: wealth does not make you wise. The only thing that defeats death is God's ransom (v. 16), and the only thing that brings understanding is wisdom (vv. 4-5) — both are divine gifts, not human achievements.

50

Summary: Psalm 50 is a covenant lawsuit (riv) psalm attributed to Asaph, in which God summons heaven and earth as witnesses, convenes a courtroom from Zion, and prosecutes two charges against his people. The first charge (vv. 7-15) addresses those who rely on sacrifice while misunderstanding its purpose — God does not need animal offerings because he owns all creation. The second charge (vv. 16-21) targets the wicked who recite God's laws but violate them in practice — thieves, adulterers, slanderers who assume God's silence means approval. The psalm closes with a warning and a promise: destruction awaits those who forget God, but salvation comes to those who offer thanksgiving and order their way rightly.

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 50 employs the covenant lawsuit (riv) form found in the prophets — God puts his people on trial, with heaven and earth as witnesses (cf. Deuteronomy 32:1, Isaiah 1:2, Micah 6:1-2). The most radical theological claim is God's rejection of the sacrificial system as a feeding arrangement: 'Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats?' (v. 13). God mocks the idea that he depends on sacrifice for sustenance — an idea common in other ancient Near Eastern religions where the gods genuinely needed offerings for food. The God of Israel owns every animal, every bird, every creature: 'If I were hungry, I would not tell you' (v. 12). The true sacrifice God desires is todah ('thanksgiving') and fulfilled vows. This anticipates the prophetic critique of empty ritual (Isaiah 1:11-17, Hosea 6:6, Amos 5:21-24, Micah 6:6-8) and points toward a worship centered on gratitude and obedience rather than external ceremony.*

Translation Friction: *The attribution le-Asaf ('of Asaph') introduces a new collection within Book II of the Psalter. Asaph was a levitical musician appointed by David (1 Chronicles 16:5, 25:1-2) — the Asaphite psalms (50, 73-83) tend toward prophetic speech, divine judgment, and covenant theology. The riv ('lawsuit') form raises a question: can God be both judge and plaintiff? In the psalm's world, yes — God is the aggrieved party who brings the case and the sovereign who renders the verdict. The distinction between the two groups addressed (vv. 7-15 vs. vv. 16-21) is sometimes blurred — both may overlap within the same community, and the psalm addresses tendencies rather than fixed categories.*

Connections: *The covenant lawsuit form connects to Deuteronomy 32 (the Song of Moses, which summons heaven and earth as witnesses), Isaiah 1:2-20 (God's indictment of Jerusalem), and Micah 6:1-8 (God's case against Israel, concluding with 'what does the LORD require of you?'). God's claim to own all animals (vv. 10-12) echoes Psalm 24:1 ('the earth is the LORD's and its fullness'). The preference for thanksgiving (todah) over blood sacrifice anticipates Hosea 6:6 ('I desire faithful love, not sacrifice') and Jesus' quotation of that verse in Matthew 9:13 and 12:7. The theophany from Zion (vv. 1-3) echoes Deuteronomy 33:2, Habakkuk 3:3, and Psalm 97:3-5.*

¹A psalm of Asaph.

God — God — the LORD —

he has spoken and summoned the earth
from the rising of the sun to its setting.

²From Zion, the perfection of beauty,
God shines forth.

³Our God comes — he will not be silent.
Fire devours before him;
around him a mighty storm rages.

⁴He calls to the heavens above
and to the earth, to judge his people.

⁵"Gather my faithful ones to me,
those who sealed my covenant by sacrifice."

⁶The heavens declare his righteousness,
for God himself is judge. Selah.

⁷"Hear, my people, and I will speak;
Israel, I will testify against you.
I am God — your God.

⁸I do not rebuke you for your sacrifices;
your burnt offerings are continually before me.

⁹I will not take a bull from your house
or goats from your pens,

¹⁰the cattle on a thousand hills.
for every beast of the forest is mine —

¹¹I know every bird of the mountains,
and the creatures of the field are mine.

¹²If I were hungry, I would not tell you,
for the world is mine and everything in it.

¹³Do I eat the flesh of mighty bulls
or drink the blood of goats?

¹⁴Sacrifice thanksgiving to God
and fulfill your vows to the Most High.

¹⁵Call on me in the day of trouble;
I will rescue you, and you will honor me."

¹⁶But to the wicked God says:
"What right have you to recite my statutes
or to take my covenant on your lips?

¹⁷You hate discipline
and throw my words behind you.

¹⁸When you see a thief, you run with him,
and your portion is with adulterers.

¹⁹You unleash your mouth for evil,
and your tongue harnesses deceit.

²⁰You sit and speak against your brother;
you slander your own mother's son.

²¹These things you have done, and I was silent.
You thought I was just like you.
But I will rebuke you
and lay the charge before your eyes.

²²Understand this, you who forget God,
lest I tear you apart with no one to rescue.

²³The one who sacrifices thanksgiving honors me,
and to the one who orders his way rightly
I will show the salvation of God."

1. The triple divine name El Elohim YHVH appears also in Joshua 22:22 in a context of covenant dispute. The accumulation of names emphasizes the authority and solemnity of the speaker — this is not a minor deity but the God of Israel in his fullest identity, speaking with absolute authority.
2. *mi-Tsiyon mikhlal yofi* ('from Zion, the completeness of beauty') — *mikhlal* ('perfection, completeness') from *kalal* ('to complete, to perfect'). Zion is the place where beauty reaches its fullness. *Elohim hofia* ('God has shone forth') — the verb *yafa* in the *hiphil* ('to shine, to appear in splendor') is theophany language, used of God's radiant self-manifestation (Deuteronomy 33:2, Psalm 80:2, 94:1). The judge does not merely arrive; he blazes.
3. The theophany of fire and storm echoes the Sinai covenant-making (Exodus 19:16-19). The same God who gave the covenant in fire now judges covenant violations in fire. The literary connection is deliberate: the terms of the agreement are being enforced by the one who established them.
4. *yiqra el ha-shamayim me'al ve-el ha-arets* ('he calls to the heavens above and to the earth') — heaven and earth are summoned as witnesses, following the covenant-witness formula of Deuteronomy 4:26, 30:19, 31:28. In ancient Near Eastern treaties, the gods were invoked as witnesses; in Israel, the created order itself witnesses God's covenant. *ladin ammo* ('to judge his people') — the verb *din* ('to judge, to execute judgment') specifies the purpose: this is a trial, and the defendants are *ammo* ('his people').
5. God speaks directly: *isfu li chasidai* ('gather to me my chasidim, my faithful ones'). The *chasidim* are those bound to God by *chesed* — covenant loyalty. They are further described as *korte veriti ale zavach* ('those who cut my covenant over sacrifice') — the verb *karat* ('to cut') is the standard term for making a covenant (from the cutting of animals in the ratification ceremony, cf. Genesis 15:10, 17). *ale zavach* ('over sacrifice') specifies the means: the covenant was sealed by blood sacrifice, evoking the Sinai covenant ceremony of Exodus 24:5-8.
6. The heavens (*shamayim*) now function as witnesses who testify to God's *tsedeq* ('righteousness') — the judge's character is established before the verdict is rendered. *ki Elohim shofet hu* ('for God himself is judge') — the emphatic *hu* ('he') stresses that God alone holds judicial authority in this proceeding. No appeal to a higher court is possible.
7. The first-person divine speech that begins here and continues through verse 23 is one of the longest divine discourses in the Psalms. God speaks directly, without prophetic mediation — the psalm itself functions as prophetic oracle.
8. God's first clarification: the problem is not that Israel has failed to sacrifice. *lo al zevachekha okhichekha* ('not on account of your sacrifices do I rebuke you') — the sacrificial system is functioning. *olotekha lenegdi tamid* ('your burnt offerings are before me continually') — the daily offerings are being presented. The accusation is not about quantity or regularity of sacrifice but about the understanding behind it.
9. Verse 9 continues the psalm's thematic and structural development.
10. The phrase *behemot be-harre alef* ('cattle on a thousand hills') has become proverbial in English. It expresses divine ownership of all creation — a principle that undermines any transactional understanding of worship. If God owns everything, sacrifice cannot be payment for services rendered.
11. *yadati kol of harim* ('I know every bird of the mountains') — God's knowledge is specific and exhaustive: he knows each individual bird. This anticipates Jesus' statement that not a sparrow falls without the Father's knowledge (Matthew 10:29). *ve-ziz sadai immadi* ('and the moving creatures of the field are with me') — *ziz* is a rare word for swarming, moving creatures. They belong to God, they are 'with' God.
12. The sarcasm of 'if I were hungry, I would not tell you' is deliberate. God mocks the notion that the creator of the universe depends on the offerings of his creatures. This does not abolish sacrifice — verse 14 will redirect it — but it destroys the transactional understanding of worship.
13. The rhetorical questions expect the answer 'no.' *ha-okhal besar abbirim* ('do I eat the flesh of mighty ones/bulls?') — *abbirim* ('mighty ones, strong bulls') emphasizes the animals' power and value. *ve-dam attudim eshteh* ('and the blood of he-goats do I drink?') — the mention of blood is pointed: blood was the most sacred element of sacrifice, poured on the altar for atonement (Leviticus 17:11). God declares he does not consume it. Sacrifice is for the worshiper's benefit, not God's.
14. *todah* is the pivot of the entire psalm. It means both 'thanksgiving' and 'confession' — the public declaration of what God has done. The *todah* offering (Leviticus 7:12) included bread and meat shared in a communal meal, making it the most relational of all sacrifices. It is the sacrifice that builds community, not merely appeases deity.
15. The three-step cycle — call, rescue, glorify — replaces the sacrificial cycle of bring, slaughter, atone. The new worship economy is relational: the worshiper's need, God's response, and the worshiper's gratitude. This is the *todah* pattern in its simplest form.
16. The accusation is aimed at religious hypocrisy — people who know the covenant terms, who can quote them, who use them in worship and teaching, but whose lives contradict everything they profess. This is not a critique of knowledge but of knowledge without corresponding obedience.
17. *saneta musar* ('you hate discipline/correction') — *musar* ('discipline, instruction, correction') is the fundamental educational concept in Proverbs. To hate *musar* is to reject the training that forms character. *vattashlekha devarai acharekha* ('and you cast my words behind you') — the physical image is of someone throwing something over their shoulder, dismissing it contemptuously. God's words are literally behind their back — out of sight, out of mind.
18. The specific violations: theft and adultery — two of the Ten Commandments. *im raita gannav vattirets immo* ('when you see a thief you run with him') — not merely tolerance but active participation. *ve-im mena'afim chelqekha* ('and with adulterers is your share') — *chelqekha* ('your portion, your share') means they have cast their lot with the unfaithful. The one who recites 'you shall not steal' and 'you shall not commit adultery' does both.
19. *pikha shalachta vera'ah* ('your mouth you have sent forth in evil') — the mouth is released like a weapon. *u-leshonkha tatsmid mirmah* ('and your tongue yokes/harnesses deceit') — the verb *tsamad* ('to bind, to yoke, to harness') pictures the tongue as an animal harnessed to pull a load of deception. Speech — the same faculty used to recite God's statutes (v. 16) — is now yoked to lies.

- 20.** The violation becomes intimate: *be-achikha tedabber* ('against your brother you speak') — not a stranger but a covenant-brother. *be-ven immekha titten dofi* ('against the son of your mother you give a blemish/defamation') — *ben immekha* ('the son of your mother') is an intensified form of 'brother,' emphasizing the closest blood relation. *dofi* ('blemish, defamation') is slander that damages reputation. The one who knows the law against bearing false witness destroys his own family.
- 21.** The accusation *dimmita heyot ehych kamokha* ('you thought I would be like you') is the psalm's most penetrating insight. The root of religious hypocrisy is the assumption that God sees as we see, values as we value, and tolerates as we tolerate. God's silence during sin is not agreement — it is the patience that precedes judgment.
- 22.** *binu na zot shokheche Eloah* ('understand this, you who forget God') — the verb *shakach* ('to forget') is the core covenant violation: forgetting God. The warning is visceral: *pen etrof* ('lest I tear') — the verb *taraf* ('to tear, to rend') is the action of a predator tearing prey. *ve-en matstsil* ('and there is no rescuer') — when God himself attacks, no one can intervene. The gentle God of verse 15 ('call on me and I will rescue') becomes the lion-God when his patience ends.
- 23.** The final verse creates a complete theology of worship: *todah* (thanksgiving) is the sacrifice, *kavod* (glory/honor) is the result for God, *derekh* (ordered way of life) is the ethical requirement, and *yesha* (salvation) is God's gift to the faithful. This is the covenant rightly understood: not transaction but relationship, not feeding God but thanking God, not ritual alone but life aligned with words.

51

Summary: *David's penitential psalm, composed after the prophet Nathan confronted him over his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah. The poem moves from desperate plea for mercy through unflinching confession of sin to a vision of restored worship and a rebuilt Zion. It is the most personal and theologically dense confession in the Hebrew Bible.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This psalm contains the most radical theology of sin and restoration in the Psalter. David does not merely confess a deed — he confesses a condition. 'In sin my mother conceived me' (v. 7) is not a statement about his mother's morality but about the depth of his entanglement with human brokenness. The psalm's central pivot comes at verse 12, where David asks for a 'clean heart' (*lev tahor*) and a 'steadfast spirit' (*ruach nakhon*) — language that echoes the creation account. David is not asking for forgiveness alone; he is asking to be re-created. The plea 'do not take your Holy Spirit from me' (v. 13) carries devastating weight: David has watched Saul lose the Spirit (1 Samuel 16:14) and knows what that looks like. He is begging not to become Saul. The psalm's climax inverts the entire sacrificial system — God does not want burnt offerings but a broken spirit (v. 19). This is not anti-cultic theology; it is the recognition that no external ritual can address what has gone wrong inside David.*

Translation Friction: *Hebrew versification counts the superscription as verses 1-2, so what English Bibles call verse 1 ('Have mercy upon me') is verse 3 in the Hebrew. We follow WLC numbering throughout. The phrase 'against you, you alone, have I sinned' (v. 6) has troubled readers because David clearly sinned against Bathsheba, Uriah, and the nation. The Hebrew is not denying horizontal harm but asserting that all sin is ultimately a violation of God's sovereignty — David broke God's moral order, and only God can restore it. The word *chatah* (v. 4, 'sin') means literally 'to miss the mark,' but in this context it carries the full weight of covenant-breaking rebellion.*

Connections: *The superscription ties this psalm directly to 2 Samuel 12:1-15, where Nathan confronts David with the parable of the poor man's lamb. The plea for hyssop (v. 9) recalls the purification rituals of Leviticus 14 (cleansing from skin disease) and Exodus 12:22 (the Passover blood). David's request for a 'new heart' anticipates Ezekiel 36:26 ('I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you'). The broken-spirit theology of verse 19 is echoed in Isaiah 57:15 and 66:2. The final two verses about rebuilding Zion's walls may reflect exilic editing, extending David's personal prayer into a national one.*

¹For the director of music.
A psalm of David.

²after he had gone in to Bathsheba.
When Nathan the prophet came to him,

³Be gracious to me, God, according to your faithful love;
according to the abundance of your compassion,
wipe out my rebellions.

⁴Wash me thoroughly from my guilt,
and from my sin cleanse me.

⁵For my rebellions — I know them,
and my sin is before me continually.

⁶Against you — you alone — have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified when you speak
and blameless when you judge.

⁷Look — in guilt I was brought forth,
and in sin my mother conceived me.

⁸Look — you desire truth in the innermost being;
so in the hidden depths, teach me wisdom.

⁹Purify me with hyssop and I will be clean;
wash me and I will be whiter than snow.

¹⁰Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

¹¹Hide your face from my sins,
and wipe out all my guilt.

¹²Create in me a clean heart, God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

¹³Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your Holy Spirit from me.

¹⁴Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain me with a willing spirit.

¹⁵Then I will teach rebels your ways,
and sinners will return to you.

¹⁶Deliver me from bloodguilt, God —
God of my salvation!
My tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.

¹⁷Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.

¹⁸For you do not desire sacrifice — I would give it;
you take no pleasure in burnt offering.

¹⁹The sacrifices God accepts are a broken spirit;
a broken and crushed heart —
God, you will not despise.

²⁰Do good to Zion in your favor;
build up the walls of Jerusalem.

²¹Then you will delight in righteous sacrifices —
burnt offering and whole offering;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The lamnatseyach superscription appears in 55 psalms and indicates the psalm was intended for liturgical performance under professional musical direction. Despite its intensely personal content, this psalm was not private — it was handed to the worship leader for public use.
2. The superscription's second half provides the historical occasion: Nathan's confrontation after David's adultery with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12). The phrase *ba el* ('went in to') is the standard Hebrew euphemism for sexual intercourse. The superscription does not soften or euphemize the event — it names both the prophet and the woman.
3. *chesed* is often rendered 'lovingkindness' (KJV) or 'steadfast love' (ESV). We render it 'faithful love' to capture both the loyalty dimension (it is covenant-bound) and the affective dimension (it is genuine love, not mere obligation). David's appeal to *chesed* is an appeal to covenant relationship — he has broken the covenant, but he is asking God's covenant character to outlast his covenant-breaking.
3. *pesha'im* ('rebellions') is the strongest of the three Hebrew sin-words used in this psalm. It denotes willful, deliberate transgression — not ignorance or weakness but conscious defiance. David chooses the most damning word available for his own behavior.
4. The three sin-words — *pesha* (v. 3), *avon* (v. 4a), and *chattath* (v. 4b) — form a comprehensive taxonomy of human wrongdoing. This same triad appears in Exodus 34:7, where God declares that he forgives 'rebellion, guilt, and sin.' David is implicitly invoking God's own self-description from Sinai.
4. *kabas* ('wash') refers specifically to the physical act of laundering, not bathing. It implies vigorous scrubbing. The stain metaphor suggests David understands his sin as something that has penetrated his being, not merely marked its surface.
5. The word *tamid* ('continually') is used in the Torah for the perpetual lamp in the tabernacle (Exodus 27:20) and the daily burnt offering (Numbers 28:6). David's sin has become as constant a presence as the offerings that were supposed to address it.
6. *lekha levaddekha* ('against you, you alone') uses the emphatic construction with the limiting particle *levad* ('only, alone'). This is not carelessness about horizontal sin but the radical theological claim that sin's ultimate target is always God — because God is the author of the moral order that sin violates.
6. The *lema'an* ('so that, in order that') clause does not mean David sinned on purpose to give God something to judge. It means that David's full confession is intended to remove any question about whether God's judgment is fair. David preemptively vindicates the judge.
7. *hen* ('look, behold') signals a shift from confession of specific acts to reflection on the human condition. David moves from 'I did this' to 'I am this.'
7. This verse does not teach that sexuality or conception is sinful. The Hebrew is a statement about human solidarity in brokenness — every person enters a world already compromised by sin. David's point is that he needs something more radical than behavioral correction.
8. *tuchot* is rare and debated. It may derive from a root meaning 'to cover, to seal' — the covered or sealed-off interior of a person. Some connect it to *tachot* ('kidneys'), which in Hebrew thought are the seat of deep emotion and conscience. Either way, the meaning is the same: the most interior, hidden dimension of a person.
8. *emet* ('truth') here means not just factual accuracy but integrity, reliability, coherence between inner reality and outward behavior. God wants David's interior to match his exterior — no more hidden sin.
9. The hyssop reference is not metaphorical decoration. It invokes the entire Levitical purification system and specifically the rituals for the most serious forms of contamination. David sees his sin as equivalent to corpse-contamination — contact with death itself.
9. The snow comparison (*mi-sheleg albin*, 'whiter than snow') anticipates Isaiah 1:18 ('though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow'). White is not merely the absence of stain but a positive quality — radiant purity.

10. The pairing of *sason ve-simchah* ('joy and gladness') is a stock phrase in Hebrew for celebratory occasions — weddings, festivals, restoration. David wants to hear the sound of celebration again, implying he has been in a silence where joy's voice was absent.
11. Normally in the Psalter, the cry is 'do not hide your face from me' (Psalms 13:1, 27:9, 69:17). Here David inverts the formula: hide your face from my sins. He wants God to look away — not from him, but from his transgressions. The verb *machah* ('wipe out') repeats from verse 3, framing this section with the same plea.
12. *bara* ('create') is never used in the Hebrew Bible for human manufacturing or crafting. It is reserved for divine acts of bringing into being what did not exist before. David is asking for something only God can do — not reformation but re-creation.
12. *nakhon* ('steadfast, established, firm') comes from *kun*, 'to be established, fixed, prepared.' It describes something stable and reliable — the opposite of the wavering spirit that allowed David to see, desire, take, and cover up.
13. *ruach qodshekha* ('your Holy Spirit') — this is one of only three places in the Hebrew Bible where the phrase 'Holy Spirit' appears (here, Isaiah 63:10-11). In this context it refers to God's empowering, sustaining presence that rests on those whom God has chosen for specific purposes. For David, it is the Spirit that came upon him at his anointing (1 Samuel 16:13).
13. The phrase *mi-lefanekha* ('from your presence/face') echoes the Cain narrative — after murdering Abel, Cain goes out 'from the presence of the LORD' (Genesis 4:16). David, who has also committed murder, fears the same exile.
14. The three-spirit sequence (vv. 12-14) — steadfast, holy, willing — forms a complete theology of spiritual restoration: internal stability, divine presence, and joyful motivation. All three must be given by God; David cannot manufacture any of them.
15. David deliberately uses the same sin-vocabulary for others that he used for himself (*posh'im* parallels *pasha'ai* in v. 3; *chatta'im* parallels *chattathi* in v. 4). He does not position himself above other sinners — he joins their company and offers to show them the path he walked back.
16. *damim* (literally 'bloods') is the technical term for blood-guilt in Hebrew law. Genesis 4:10 uses the same plural when Abel's 'bloods' cry from the ground. The plural may intensify the concept or reflect the multiple deaths David's order caused.
16. The irony of David's tongue singing *tsedaqah* ('righteousness') is sharp — the tongue that dictated the letter ordering Uriah's death (2 Samuel 11:15) will be repurposed as an instrument of praise.
17. The address shifts from *Elohim* ('God') to *Adonai* ('Lord, Master') — the personal, relational name that emphasizes God's authority and David's submission. David positions himself as a servant before his master, asking the master to give him the ability to speak.
18. This verse is not anti-sacrificial. David is not saying sacrifices are worthless in general but that his specific sin exceeds what the sacrificial system was designed to handle. The high-handed sin of Numbers 15:30 — deliberate rebellion — has no prescribed offering. David needs something beyond the system.
19. The plural *zivchei Elohim* ('the sacrifices of God') uses the construct form: these are not sacrifices offered to God but sacrifices that belong to God — sacrifices that are truly his. The broken spirit is God's sacrifice because God produced it.
19. *nidkeh* ('crushed') is related to *dakka* in Isaiah 57:15, where God 'dwells with the crushed and lowly of spirit.' The theology is consistent: God's presence is drawn to human brokenness, not human achievement.
20. Many scholars believe verses 20-21 are an exilic addition, extending David's personal prayer into a communal one relevant to the Babylonian exile. Whether original or added, the verses make a theological point: individual sin and communal devastation are connected, and restoration must encompass both.
21. *zivchei tsedeq* ('sacrifices of righteousness') — sacrifices that are right and proper because they emerge from a right relationship with God. The contrast with *zivchei Elohim* ('sacrifices of God' = a broken spirit) in verse 19 is deliberate: both are valid, but one must precede the other.
21. *kalil* ('whole offering') refers to a sacrifice entirely consumed on the altar — nothing held back. The theological echo is that David, having held nothing back in confession, can now offer a sacrifice that holds nothing back either.

52

Summary: *A wisdom psalm contrasting the fate of a powerful person who trusts in wealth and destructive speech with the righteous who trust in God's faithful love. The superscription connects it to Doeg the Edomite's betrayal of the priests at Nob. The psalm moves from accusation to the wicked person's downfall to the psalmist's confident trust.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The psalm's central image is botanical: the wicked person is uprooted and torn from the land of the living (v. 7), while the psalmist is a flourishing olive tree in God's house (v. 10). The contrast is between rootedness and rootlessness — the wicked trusted in wealth (a portable asset) while the righteous is planted in God's presence (a fixed location). The olive tree metaphor is carefully chosen: olive trees live for centuries, produce fruit continually, and are nearly impossible to kill.*

Even when cut down, they regenerate from the roots. David is saying his trust in God's chesed has root systems that outlast destruction.

Translation Friction: The superscription's connection to Doeg the Edomite (1 Samuel 22:9-19) is not immediately obvious from the psalm's content, which addresses a more generalized 'mighty one' (gibbor). Doeg informed Saul that the priests at Nob had helped David, and then personally slaughtered 85 priests when Saul's own soldiers refused. The psalm may have originated from that specific event and been generalized for liturgical use. Hebrew verse numbering counts the two-verse superscription as verses 1-2.

Connections: The Doeg episode is narrated in 1 Samuel 21:7 and 22:9-19. The olive tree image connects to Jeremiah 11:16, where Israel is called a 'green olive tree,' and Romans 11:17-24, where Paul develops olive tree theology. The tongue-as-weapon imagery (vv. 4-6) parallels Psalm 57:4 and James 3:5-8. The contrast between trusting in wealth and trusting in God anticipates Jesus's teaching in Luke 12:16-21.

¹For the director of music.

A maskil of David.

²When Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul,
saying to him, "David has come to the house of Ahimelech."

³Why do you boast in evil, mighty one?
The faithful love of God endures all day long.

⁴Your tongue devises destruction,
like a sharpened razor, working deceit.

⁵You love evil more than good,
lying more than speaking what is right.
Selah.

⁶You love every devouring word,
you deceitful tongue.

⁷So God will tear you down forever;
he will snatch you and rip you from your tent,
and uproot you from the land of the living.
Selah.

⁸The righteous will see and stand in awe,
and they will laugh at him:

⁹"Look — the man who would not make God his refuge,
but trusted in his great wealth
and grew strong in his own destruction."

¹⁰But I am like a flourishing olive tree
in the house of God.
I trust in the faithful love of God
forever and always.

¹¹I will thank you forever because you have acted;
I will wait on your name, for it is good,
in the presence of your faithful ones.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. maskil is a psalm classification appearing in 13 psalm superscriptions. Its exact meaning is debated — it may derive from sakal ('to be prudent, to have insight') and indicate a wisdom or instructional psalm. The term suggests this psalm is meant to teach something, not merely express emotion.
2. Doeg was Saul's chief herdsman, an Edomite in Israelite service. His report to Saul about David's visit to the priest Ahimelech at Nob (1 Samuel 22:9-10) led to the massacre of 85 priests. Doeg personally carried out the slaughter when Saul's own soldiers refused. The psalm's focus on the destructive tongue makes sense in this context — Doeg's words killed an entire priestly community.
3. The syntax of verse 3b is compressed and debated. Some read it as a continuation of the question: 'Why do you boast in evil, mighty one — while the faithful love of God endures all day?' Others read it as a separate declaration. Either way, the contrast between human evil and divine chesed is the structural foundation of the psalm.
4. The razor metaphor is more chilling than a sword metaphor would be. A sword is an obvious weapon; a razor is a tool for grooming that has been repurposed for harm. The destruction comes from something that looks innocuous — a report, a piece of information, a truth told at the right moment to the right person.
5. The comparison is not between evil and neutrality but between evil and good — this person actively prefers destruction over benefit, falsehood over truth. The selah at the end signals a musical pause, giving the accusation time to settle.
6. divrei vala ('devouring words') — vala means 'to swallow, to devour, to engulf.' These are words that consume people, that destroy lives when released. The phrase leshon mirmah ('tongue of deceit') becomes an epithet — the person is identified with their organ of destruction.
7. The four verbs create a sense of escalating violence. God does not merely punish; he demolishes, snatches, rips, and uproots. The language mirrors the violence the gibbor inflicted through speech — destruction returns to the destroyer in physical form.
8. The sequence — seeing, fearing, laughing — traces the emotional arc of watching divine justice unfold. The fear (yira'u) is not terror but awe at God's justice. The laughter (yischaku) is not cruelty but the release of tension when the bully finally falls. The righteous have lived under this person's threats; his downfall vindicates their endurance.
9. The quotation marks in the rendering indicate that the righteous are speaking — this is their commentary on the fallen gibbor. The diagnosis is precise: the problem was not weakness but misplaced trust. Strength invested in wealth and destruction rather than in God produces a person who looks powerful but has no roots.
10. Olive trees were planted in temple courtyards and palace grounds throughout the ancient Near East. The image of being 'in the house of God' as an olive tree suggests permanent residence in God's presence — a living thing rooted where God dwells.
10. The phrase olam va-ed ('forever and always') uses two words for permanence: olam ('age, eternity, ancient time') and ed ('perpetuity, continuing'). The doubling emphasizes duration without end.
11. chasidim ('faithful ones') derives from the same root as chesed. These are the people defined by covenant loyalty — they reflect God's character in human community. David's final word places him not in isolation but in the company of the faithful, contrasting with the gibbor's solitary fall.

53

Summary: *A near-duplicate of Psalm 14, this wisdom psalm indicts universal human corruption. The 'fool' (naval) declares there is no God — not as philosophical atheism but as practical denial that God sees or acts. God looks down from heaven and finds no one doing good. The psalm ends with a cry for salvation from Zion.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 53 is almost identical to Psalm 14, with two significant differences: Psalm 53 uses Elohim ('God') where Psalm 14 uses YHWH ('the LORD'), and verse 6 diverges significantly from Psalm 14:5-6. The existence of both versions in the Psalter suggests they circulated in different liturgical collections — one associated with the divine name YHWH (Psalms 1-41, the 'Yahwistic Psalter') and one with Elohim (Psalms 42-83, the 'Elohistic Psalter'). The editorial history is itself a witness to how living communities adapted and reused sacred texts for different worship contexts. The psalm's most devastating claim is not that some people are wicked but that 'there is no one who does good — not even one' (v. 4). This is not an observation about a particular group but a verdict on the human condition. Paul quotes this psalm in Romans 3:10-12 to establish universal human sinfulness.*

Translation Friction: The word naval ('fool') in verse 2 does not mean intellectually stupid. In Hebrew wisdom literature, the naval is the person who is morally dense — who acts as if actions have no consequences and God has no interest in human behavior. Nabal, the husband of Abigail (1 Samuel 25), is the narrative illustration: his name means 'fool,' and his behavior confirms it. The psalm's 'atheism' is practical, not theoretical — the fool lives as if God is absent, regardless of what they might formally believe.

Connections: Nearly identical to Psalm 14, which belongs to the first book of the Psalter (Psalms 1-41). Paul quotes from this psalm tradition extensively in Romans 3:10-18. The 'looking down from heaven' motif echoes Genesis 11:5 (God descending to see Babel) and Genesis 18:21 (God going down to investigate Sodom). The cry for salvation from Zion (v. 7) connects to the Zion theology of Psalms 46, 48, and 76.

¹For the director of music. According to Machalath.
A maskil of David.

²The fool says in his heart,
"There is no God."
They are corrupt, they commit vile injustice;
there is no one who does good.

³God looks down from heaven
upon the children of humanity,
to see if there is anyone who has insight,
anyone who seeks God.

⁴All of them have turned away;
together they have become foul.
There is no one who does good —
not even one.

⁵Do the workers of wickedness not know —
those who eat my people as they eat bread?
They do not call on God.

⁶There they are — seized by terror
where there was no terror!
For God scatters the bones of those who besiege you;
you put them to shame,
because God has rejected them.

⁷Who will give salvation to Israel from Zion?
When God restores the fortunes of his people,
Jacob will rejoice,
Israel will be glad!

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Machalath may refer to a melody, a musical instrument, or a mode of performance. Some derive it from chalah ('to be sick, to suffer'), suggesting a mournful or lamenting tone. Others connect it to machol ('dance'). The term appears only here and in Psalm 88. Its exact meaning is lost.
2. naval does not describe intellectual capacity but moral orientation. The naval in Proverbs and the wisdom tradition is the person who refuses to align their life with reality as God has structured it. They may be shrewd and successful — but they are fools because they act as if the moral order does not apply to them.

2. Psalm 53:2 differs from Psalm 14:1 in using *hit'ivu avel* ('they commit vile injustice') instead of Psalm 14's *hit'ivu alilah* ('they commit vile deeds'). The substitution of *avel* ('injustice, wrong') for *alilah* ('deeds, practices') sharpens the accusation toward systemic injustice.
3. Psalm 53:3 uses *mi-shamayim* ('from heaven') where Psalm 14:2 uses *mi-shamayim* as well, but Psalm 53 uses *Elohim* throughout where Psalm 14 uses *YHWH*. This *Elohistic* editing is characteristic of Psalms 42-83.
4. Paul's quotation of this passage in Romans 3:10-12 uses it to establish that both Jews and Gentiles stand under the same verdict of universal sinfulness. The psalm's original context may be more limited — describing a particular corrupt generation — but its language is absolute enough to sustain the universal application Paul gives it.
4. *ne'elachu* is unique to this psalm (Psalm 14:3 uses *ne'elachu* as well). The root may be related to *alach*, suggesting souring or going rancid — an image of organic decay applied to moral condition.
5. The bread-eating metaphor for oppression appears also in Micah 3:2-3, where rulers 'eat the flesh of my people' and 'strip their skin from them.' The image emphasizes the routine, unreflective nature of exploitation — it is as ordinary to the oppressor as a daily meal.
6. This verse is the primary textual difference between Psalms 14 and 53. Psalm 14:5-6 reads: 'There they are in great dread, for God is with the generation of the righteous. You would confound the plans of the poor, but the LORD is their refuge.' Psalm 53:6 replaces this with a military scene of divine judgment. The difference suggests the two psalms were adapted for different historical situations.
6. *pizar atsmot* ('scatters bones') is violent imagery — in the ancient Near East, the scattering of bones meant complete destruction with no possibility of burial, the ultimate dishonor.
7. *shevut* (or *shivat*) ammo is debated — it can mean 'captivity of his people' or 'fortunes of his people.' The root *shuv* suggests a restoration or reversal of condition. In exilic and post-exilic contexts it naturally refers to return from Babylon, but the idiom is broader: God will undo what has gone wrong.
7. The double naming — Jacob and Israel — uses both the personal and national names of the patriarch to encompass the full identity of God's people. Rejoicing and gladness are the expected response to divine deliverance throughout the Psalter.

54

Summary: *A compact psalm of lament and trust, attributed to David when the Ziphites betrayed his hiding place to Saul. David cries out to God for salvation by God's name and might, declares that strangers have risen against him, and concludes with confident thanksgiving for deliverance.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This is one of the shortest lament psalms in the Psalter, yet it contains a complete arc: invocation (vv. 3-4), complaint (v. 5), confession of trust (v. 6), and thanksgiving (vv. 8-9). The psalm's efficiency is itself a theological statement — David does not elaborate, explain, or negotiate. He names the crisis, names God, and moves directly to trust. The opening plea 'save me by your name' (v. 3) is particularly striking: David asks God to deploy his name (*shem*) as a weapon. In the ancient Near East, a name carried the full weight of its bearer's identity, power, and reputation. To be saved 'by God's name' is to be saved by everything God is.*

Translation Friction: *Hebrew versification counts the superscription as verses 1-2, so the prayer begins at verse 3. The Ziphites were residents of Ziph in the hill country of Judah — David's own tribal territory. Their betrayal was especially bitter because they were his kinsmen. The word *zarim* ('strangers, foreigners') in verse 5 is puzzling if the Ziphites were Judahites; some manuscripts read *zedim* ('arrogant ones') instead, which better fits the context of internal betrayal. The WLC preserves *zarim*.*

Connections: *The Ziphite betrayal is narrated in 1 Samuel 23:19-24 and 26:1. David's appeal to God's name (*shem*) connects to the theology of the divine name in Exodus 3:13-15 and the third commandment (Exodus 20:7). The pattern of lament-to-praise mirrors Psalm 13 and Psalm 22. The voluntary thank offering (*nedavah*) in the closing verse connects to the freewill offering legislation in Leviticus 7:16.*

¹For the director of music. With stringed instruments.
A maskil of David.

²When the Ziphites came and said to Saul,
"Is not David hiding among us?"

³God, save me by your name,
and vindicate me by your might.

⁴God, hear my prayer;
give ear to the words of my mouth.

⁵For strangers have risen against me,
and ruthless ones seek my life.
They have not set God before them.
Selah.

⁶Look — God is my helper;
the Lord is among those who sustain my life.

⁷He will return the evil upon my enemies;
in your faithfulness, destroy them.

⁸With a freewill offering I will sacrifice to you;
I will give thanks to your name, LORD, for it is good.

⁹For he has delivered me from every trouble,
and my eye has looked on my enemies in triumph.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. *neginot* ('stringed instruments') indicates accompaniment by lyres, harps, or similar instruments. The combination of instrumental accompaniment with the *maskil* classification suggests a reflective, meditative performance style.
2. The Ziphites were inhabitants of Ziph, a town in the southern hill country of Judah (Joshua 15:55). They informed Saul of David's location twice (1 Samuel 23:19 and 26:1). As fellow Judahites, their betrayal was a kin-against-kin violation — the very people who should have protected David turned him over to his persecutor.
3. *tedineni* ('judge me') in this context means 'render a just verdict on my behalf' — vindication, not condemnation. David is asking God to adjudicate between him and his enemies and to demonstrate by his actions whose side justice is on.
4. The two verbs — *shema* ('hear') and *ha'azinah* ('give ear, listen attentively') — form an intensifying parallel. The first asks God to receive the prayer; the second asks for focused, deliberate attention. *imrei fi* ('words of my mouth') is a formal expression that elevates the speech from casual request to solemn petition.
5. The textual variant *zarim/zedim* matters for historical context but not for theology. Whether the betrayers are 'strangers' (distanced from David despite being kinsmen) or 'arrogant ones' (acting with presumptuous disregard), the result is the same: they act without reference to God.
6. *be-somkhei nafshi* ('among those who sustain my life') uses the participle of *samakh* ('to support, uphold, lean upon'). God is counted among those who prop David up — the same verb used in Psalm 51:14 for God sustaining David with a willing spirit.
7. *hatsmitem* ('destroy them, cut them off') is from *tsamat*, meaning to silence, to put an end to, to annihilate. It is a severe verb — David is not asking for mild correction but for the permanent elimination of the threat. This reflects the life-or-death reality of his situation: the Ziphites' information could lead to his execution.
8. The shift from *Elohim* throughout the psalm to *YHWH* ('LORD') in the final verse is unusual in the Elohistic Psalter (Psalms 42-83). It may preserve the original text before Elohistic editing, or it may be a deliberate use of the covenant name at the psalm's climax — the moment of most intimate address.
9. The final verse speaks in the past tense — *hitsilani* ('he has delivered me') — though the deliverance may not yet have happened. This is the 'prophetic perfect,' a Hebrew convention where future events are described in past tense because their certainty is so complete that they can be spoken of as already accomplished. David's trust in God's faithfulness is so firm that he speaks of rescue as a completed fact.

55

Summary: *A lament psalm driven by the anguish of betrayal by a close friend. David cries out under the weight of enemies, expresses a desperate wish to flee like a dove into the wilderness, and then reveals the deepest wound: the betrayer is not a stranger but an intimate companion. The psalm oscillates between terror and trust, ending with a command to cast one's burden on the LORD.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This psalm contains one of the most psychologically raw passages in the Hebrew Bible (vv. 13-15). David's pain is not primarily from enemies — enemies he can handle — but from a friend, a companion (aluf, meyudda), someone with whom he walked to God's house in fellowship. The betrayal of intimacy is more devastating than the hostility of strangers because it corrupts the place where trust lived. The dove-flight fantasy (vv. 7-9) is not escapism but an honest expression of the human wish, under unbearable pressure, to simply disappear. David wants wings — not to fight, not to conquer, but to fly away and rest. The Hebrew Bible rarely grants its heroes the luxury of pretending they are unbreakable.*

Translation Friction: *The historical setting is uncertain. The description of a friend's betrayal has led to associations with Ahithophel, David's counselor who defected to Absalom's rebellion (2 Samuel 15:12, 31). This identification is plausible but not certain — the psalm's language is general enough to apply to any intimate betrayal. The text of verse 16 (Hebrew) is difficult; the shift between singular and plural enemies, and between second and third person address, suggests either a complex rhetorical strategy or textual disturbance.*

Connections: *The Ahithophel connection links to 2 Samuel 15-17 and Jesus's betrayal by Judas (the early church read this psalm christologically, as in Acts 1:16-20). The dove imagery connects to Song of Songs 2:14 and Hosea 7:11. The command to 'cast your burden on the LORD' (v. 23) is quoted in 1 Peter 5:7. The description of the friend's smooth speech hiding violence (v. 22) echoes Proverbs 26:23-26.*

¹For the director of music. With stringed instruments.
A maskil of David.

²Give ear to my prayer, God,
and do not hide yourself from my plea.

³Pay attention to me and answer me!
I am restless in my anguish;
I groan aloud.

⁴Because of the voice of the enemy,
because of the pressure of the wicked —
for they heap trouble upon me
and in anger they bear a grudge against me.

⁵My heart writhes within me,
and the terrors of death have fallen upon me.

⁶Fear and trembling come over me,
and shuddering covers me.

⁷And I said, "Who will give me wings like a dove?
I would fly away and find rest.

⁸I would flee far away;
I would lodge in the wilderness.
Selah.

⁹I would hurry to my shelter
from the raging wind and storm."

¹⁰Confuse their speech, Lord! Divide their tongues!
For I have seen violence and conflict in the city.

¹¹Day and night they circle its walls;
trouble and misery are within it.

¹²Destruction is within it;
oppression and deceit never leave its public square.

¹³For it is not an enemy who taunts me —
that I could bear.
It is not a foe who rises against me —
from that one I could hide.

¹⁴But it was you — a man my equal,
my companion, my close friend.

¹⁵Together we shared sweet counsel;
we walked in the house of God among the throng.

¹⁶Let death come upon them suddenly;
let them go down to Sheol alive,
for evil is in their dwelling and within them.

¹⁷As for me, I call upon God,
and the LORD will save me.

¹⁸Evening and morning and noon
I cry out in anguish,
and he hears my voice.

¹⁹He redeems my life in peace
from the battle waged against me,
for many are on my side.

²⁰God will hear and humble them —
he who sits enthroned from of old.
Selah.
For they have no fear of change;
they do not fear God.

²¹He stretched out his hands against those at peace with him;
he violated his covenant.

²²His speech was smooth as butter,
but war was in his heart.
His words were softer than oil,
yet they were drawn swords.

²³Cast your burden on the LORD,
and he will sustain you.
He will never allow
the righteous to be shaken.

²⁴But you, God, will bring them down
to the pit of destruction.
Men of blood and deceit
will not live out half their days.
But I — I will trust in you.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The same superscription as Psalm 54 — stringed instruments accompanying a wisdom psalm. The musical instruction suggests a reflective, measured performance, which contrasts sharply with the emotional turbulence of the psalm's content.
2. The verb *titallam* ('hide yourself') is reflexive — David fears that God is deliberately concealing himself, choosing not to be found. The plea is not just 'hear me' but 'stop hiding from me.' The word *techinah* ('plea, supplication') suggests an urgent, desperate request — not a routine prayer but a cry from someone with nowhere else to turn.
3. The accumulation of prayer-verbs (give ear, pay attention, answer) reveals escalating desperation. Each verb is more demanding than the last. David is not maintaining decorum in prayer — he is a man at the end of his capacity.
4. The enemies' weapon is their voice (*qol oyev*) — words again, as in Psalm 52. The word *aqat* ('pressure, oppression') suggests squeezing, constriction, being pressed into a tighter and tighter space. *yamitu* ('they heap, they cause to slide down') — trouble is piled on top of David. And *yistemuni* ('they bear a grudge') from *satam*, meaning to harbor lasting hostility — this is not a momentary conflict but sustained, malicious hatred.
5. *yachil* ('writhes, trembles, convulses') is the verb used for labor pains — David's heart is in the grip of contractions, a pain that comes in waves and cannot be controlled. *eimot mavet* ('terrors of death') — the dread is not abstract but specific: David genuinely fears for his life.
6. Three words for terror in sequence: *yir'ah* ('fear'), *ra'ad* ('trembling'), and *pallatsut* ('shuddering, horror'). The escalation is physical: from internal fear to bodily trembling to full-body horror that covers (*tekasseni*) him like a garment. David is wearing his terror.
7. *mi yitten li* ('who will give me') is the standard Hebrew idiom for 'if only' — expressing a wish the speaker knows is impossible. David knows he cannot become a dove. The fantasy is therapeutic, not delusional.
8. The *midbar* ('wilderness') is not merely uninhabited space — in the Hebrew Bible it is the place of encounter with God (Sinai), of testing (Israel's wandering), and of refuge (David's own experience in the Judean wilderness). David wants to return to the wilderness where things were simpler, harder, but honest.
9. The storm metaphor (*ruach so'ah, sa'ar*) captures the chaos of the political and personal crisis. The *miflaht* ('shelter, escape, refuge') is the place where the storm cannot reach. David closes his dove-fantasy with the image of finding cover from a tempest — the crisis is weather he cannot control, and he needs a roof.
10. The Babel allusion is deliberate: just as God disrupted human conspiracy at Babel by dividing language, David asks God to disrupt the conspiracy against him by making his enemies unable to communicate effectively.
11. The enemies patrol the city walls day and night — whether as besiegers or as corrupt authorities within the city. *aven ve-amal* ('trouble and misery') are personified as resident forces within the city. The safe space has been corrupted from the inside.
12. The *rechov* ('public square, broad place') was the center of civic life — where commerce, justice, and community gathering took place. When *tokh u-mirmah* ('oppression and deceit') permanently occupy the public square, the entire civic order has collapsed.
13. The conditional structure ('if it were an enemy... I could bear it') is a rhetorical setup for the devastating revelation in the next verses. David is saying: I am not undone by hostility from the expected direction. I am undone by hostility from where I least expected it.
14. If the Ahithophel identification is correct, the description fits precisely. Ahithophel was David's most trusted counselor (2 Samuel 16:23 says his counsel was 'as if one inquired of the word of God'). His defection to Absalom was the most personally devastating event of the entire rebellion.

14. meyuḏḏa'i ('my intimate') from yada — the Hebrew verb for the deepest kind of knowing, used for sexual intimacy, for God's knowledge of Israel, and for the closest human relationships. This person knew David in a way that made the betrayal maximally destructive.
15. sod ('counsel, secret, intimate circle') is the word used for God's own divine council in Job 15:8 and Psalm 89:7. When David says he shared sod with this friend, he is describing the highest level of human intimacy — the exchange of thoughts that are shared with no one else.
16. The Korah allusion (going down to Sheol alive) is the most severe imprecation available in the Hebrew idiom. It invokes the one occasion in the Torah where the earth itself punished rebellion by swallowing the rebels whole. David sees the betrayal of friendship as equivalent to the rebellion against divinely appointed leadership.
17. The emphatic ani ('as for me') sets David apart from the corrupt city and the treacherous friend. Whatever they do, he will call on God. The shift from Elohim to YHWH mirrors Psalm 54:8 — the covenant name appears at the moment of deepest trust.
18. The three times — evening, morning, noon — may reflect a practice of praying three times daily (Daniel 6:10). The sequence begins with evening because the Hebrew day begins at sunset. The present tense 'he hears' (vayyishma) expresses confidence: God's hearing is not future hope but present reality.
19. The verb padah is covenantal — it is used for God's redemption of Israel from Egypt (Deuteronomy 7:8) and for the redemption of the firstborn (Exodus 13:13). David sees his personal rescue as participating in the same pattern of divine redemption.
20. chalifot ('changes, alternations') may refer to changes of fortune, changes of behavior, or the absence of divine discipline. The point is consistent: these people have lived without consequences, and consequence-free existence breeds contempt for God.
21. chillel berito ('profaned his covenant') uses the same verb applied to desecrating the Sabbath (Exodus 31:14) or God's name (Leviticus 22:32). The friendship-covenant is treated with the same reverence as religious covenants — violating it is not just rude but sacrilegious.
22. This verse is the classic biblical description of the smooth-talking betrayer. Proverbs 26:23-28 develops the same theme: 'Smooth lips with an evil heart are like glaze on an earthen pot.' The drawn-swords image suggests premeditation — these words were weapons prepared in advance.
23. 1 Peter 5:7 directly echoes this verse: 'Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.' Peter's Greek (epiripsantes) mirrors the forceful Hebrew hashlek — this is not polite delegation but desperate unloading.
23. yehavkha is a hapax legomenon — it appears only here in the Hebrew Bible. Its meaning is derived from context and cognate languages. The rarity of the word adds to its weight: this is not a standard theological term but a unique expression for the specific thing that weighs on you.
24. The contrast between 'half their days' and David's trust creates a temporal theology: the wicked's time is cut short; the trusting one's relationship with God has no expiration. The psalm does not promise that the righteous will live long — it promises that trust in God transcends the question of duration.

56

Summary: *A psalm of trust amid pursuit, attributed to David when the Philistines seized him in Gath. David confesses his fear, declares his trust in God's word, and expresses confidence that God keeps a record of his tears. The psalm features a refrain — 'In God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?' — that punctuates the movement from terror to faith.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Verse 9 (Hebrew) contains one of the most intimate images of God in the entire Bible: 'Put my tears in your bottle; are they not in your record?' David imagines God carefully collecting each tear — not wiping them away, not stopping them, but preserving them as evidence that matters. The no'd ('bottle, wineskin') was a traveler's essential possession; David pictures God as carrying David's grief with him. The metaphor says: your suffering is not wasted, not forgotten, not invisible. God keeps receipts. This is not stoic theology — it is a God who is moved by human pain and stores it as something precious.*

Translation Friction: *The superscription references David's capture by the Philistines in Gath (1 Samuel 21:10-15), where David feigned madness to escape. But Psalm 34's superscription covers the same event using the name 'Abimelech' instead of 'Achish.' These may reflect different traditions about the same event, or the name 'Abimelech' in Psalm 34 may be a dynastic title rather than a personal name. The phrase yonat elem rechoqim in the superscription (v. 1) is obscure — possibly a melody name meaning 'the silent dove of distant places' or 'the dove of the distant terebinths.'*

Connections: The Gath episode is in 1 Samuel 21:10-15. The refrain 'what can flesh do to me?' is quoted in Hebrews 13:6. The tear-bottle image connects to Revelation 21:4 ('God will wipe every tear from their eyes'). David's vow-language in the closing verses connects to the thank-offering tradition of Leviticus 7 and Psalm 50:14.

¹For the director of music. According to "The Silent Dove of Distant Places."
A miktam of David, when the Philistines seized him in Gath.

²Be gracious to me, God, for people trample me;
all day long an attacker presses me.

³My enemies trample me all day long,
for many are fighting against me, O Most High.

⁴On the day I am afraid,
I will trust in you.

⁵In God — I praise his word.
In God I trust; I will not be afraid.
What can flesh do to me?

⁶All day long they twist my words;
all their thoughts are against me for evil.

⁷They band together, they lurk,
they watch my steps,
as they wait for my life.

⁸For their wickedness — will they escape?
In anger, God, bring down the peoples!

⁹You have counted my wanderings.
Put my tears in your bottle —
are they not in your record?

¹⁰Then my enemies will turn back
on the day I call.
This I know: God is for me.

¹¹In God — I praise his word.
In the LORD — I praise his word.

¹²In God I trust; I will not be afraid.
What can a mere human do to me?

¹³Upon me, God, are my vows to you;
I will fulfill thank offerings to you.

¹⁴For you have delivered my life from death,
my feet from stumbling,
so that I may walk before God
in the light of the living.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. yonat elem rechoqim is one of the most mysterious phrases in the psalm superscriptions. yonah ('dove') connects to David's dove-wish in Psalm 55:7; elem ('silence, muteness') may describe the dove or David's own silenced state; rechoqim ('distant ones, far-off places') captures David's situation as a fugitive far from home. If this is a melody name, it evokes the theme of vulnerable exile. miktam appears in six psalm titles (Psalms 16, 56-60) and its meaning is uncertain — possibly from katam ('to cover, to conceal') suggesting a hidden or precious song, or from ketem ('gold'), suggesting something golden or valuable.
2. she'afani ('trample me, crush me, pant after me') can mean either to snap at (like a beast) or to trample underfoot. enosh ('mortal, human being') is used rather than ish ('man'), emphasizing the frailty of the oppressor — merely human. The irony: a mortal is trampling another mortal, as if one had authority over the other.
3. The repetition of kol ha-yom ('all day long') from verse 2 emphasizes the relentless nature of the persecution. marom ('Most High, the height') — David addresses God by a title that places God above all the enemies who surround him below. The contrast is spatial: David is pressed on the ground level, but God is above it all.
4. The brevity of the Hebrew is striking — six words in Hebrew, no embellishment, no theological argument. The simplicity itself is the theology: when afraid, trust. The relationship between fear and trust is not sequential (first stop being afraid, then trust) but simultaneous (afraid and trusting at the same time).
5. The refrain appears here (v. 5) and again in verses 11-12, framing the psalm's center. Hebrews 13:6 echoes this refrain: 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?' The move from 'flesh' (basar) to 'anyone' (anthropos) in the Greek translation preserves the point: human opposition is finite.
6. ye'atsevu devarai ('they twist/distort my words') — the verb atsav can mean 'to grieve, to hurt, to twist, to shape.' David's words are being reshaped by his enemies — taken out of context, reinterpreted, weaponized. The information war precedes the physical one.
7. Three verbs of surveillance: yaguru ('they band together, they attack'), yitsponu ('they hide, they lurk'), and yishmoru ('they watch, they keep guard over'). The enemies are organized, hidden, and patient. aqevai ('my steps, my heels') — they track David's movements. The hunting imagery is precise: a coordinated team stalking prey.
8. The rhetorical question expects a negative answer: no, they will not escape on account of (al) their wickedness. David then asks God to act: be-af ('in anger') hored ('bring down, cast down') ammim ('peoples, nations'). The plural 'peoples' may refer to the Philistines or to all hostile nations. God's anger is not arbitrary rage but the appropriate response of justice to sustained wickedness.
9. The wordplay between nodi ('my wandering') and no'dekha ('your bottle/skin') connects David's homeless journeying with God's careful preservation. The wandering produces tears; the tears are stored. There is a poetic justice: what exile costs David, God saves.
9. sifrathekha ('your record, your account') is from the same root as sefer ('book, scroll'). God is depicted as keeping written records — the same image appears in Malachi 3:16 ('a scroll of remembrance') and Daniel 7:10 ('the books were opened').
10. zeh yada'ti ('this I know') is emphatic — it is not hope or wish but settled knowledge. The basis of the knowledge is not David's worthiness but God's character. God is 'for' the vulnerable one who trusts, not 'for' the powerful one who oppresses.
11. The refrain now doubles the divine name: Elohim and YHWH. The expansion from one name to two intensifies the praise — David invokes God both as the universal Creator (Elohim) and as the covenant LORD (YHWH). Both identities are praised for the same thing: his davar ('word').
12. The refrain repeats from verse 5 with one change: basar ('flesh') is replaced by adam ('human being, mortal'). The substitution reinforces the point from a different angle — basar emphasizes physical frailty; adam emphasizes creaturely status. Whether viewed as fragile flesh or as a creature under God, the enemy is no match for the God David trusts.
13. nedarekha ('your vows' or 'my vows to you') — David acknowledges that he has made promises to God during his distress and now commits to fulfilling them. todot ('thank offerings, praises') — from the root yadah ('to give thanks, to confess'). The todah is both a sacrifice and a declaration of gratitude.
14. or ha-chayyim ('the light of the living') contrasts with the darkness of Sheol and death that threatened throughout the psalm. Light in Hebrew poetry is nearly synonymous with life, blessing, and God's presence (Psalm 36:9: 'In your light we see light'). David's rescue is not just from death but into a quality of life defined by God's luminous presence.

57

Summary: *A psalm of refuge and praise, attributed to David when he fled from Saul into a cave. David takes shelter under God's wings, declares his trust amid enemies whose teeth are spears and whose tongues are sharp swords, and erupts into praise that aims to wake the dawn. The psalm features the refrain 'Be exalted above the heavens, God; let your glory be over all the earth.'*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The psalm's most striking moment is verse 9 (Hebrew): 'Wake up, my glory! Wake up, harp and lyre! I will wake the dawn.' David does not wait for the dawn to come and bring hope — he commands his instruments to rouse the dawn itself. This is the audacity of worship in darkness: the singer does not wait for conditions to improve before praising. The praise itself becomes the agent that summons the new day. The cave setting (whether Adullam, 1 Samuel 22:1, or En-gedi, 1 Samuel 24:3) adds physical texture — David is literally underground, in darkness, hiding, and from that place he declares that God's faithfulness reaches the skies (v. 11).*

Translation Friction: *The superscription says al tashchet ('do not destroy'), which may be a melody name or a liturgical instruction. Some connect it to David's refusal to destroy Saul in the cave at En-gedi (1 Samuel 24:4-7) or in the Wilderness of Ziph (1 Samuel 26:9). The second half of this psalm (vv. 8-12) reappears almost identically as Psalm 108:2-6, suggesting that psalm compositions could be modular — sections recombined for different liturgical purposes.*

Connections: *The cave setting connects to 1 Samuel 22:1 (cave of Adullam) or 24:1-7 (cave at En-gedi). The 'wings' refuge image (v. 2) echoes Ruth 2:12 and Psalm 36:7. The teeth-as-spears imagery (v. 5) parallels Psalm 52:4 and Proverbs 30:14. Psalm 108:2-6 reuses verses 8-12. The faithfulness-to-the-skies language (v. 11) appears also in Psalm 36:5 and 89:2.*

¹For the director of music. "Do Not Destroy."

A miktam of David, when he fled from Saul into the cave.

²Be gracious to me, God — be gracious to me,
for in you my soul takes refuge.
In the shadow of your wings I will take shelter
until the storms of destruction pass.

³I call out to God Most High,
to God who fulfills his purpose for me.

⁴He will send from heaven and save me;
he rebukes the one who tramples me.
Selah.
God will send his faithful love and his truth.

⁵My soul lies down among lions,
among people who are ablaze —
whose teeth are spears and arrows,
whose tongue is a sharpened sword.

⁶Be exalted above the heavens, God!
Let your glory be over all the earth!

⁷They set a net for my steps;
my soul was bowed low.

They dug a pit before me —
they fell into it themselves!
Selah.

⁸My heart is steady, God;
my heart is steady.
I will sing — I will make music!

⁹Wake up, my glory!
Wake up, harp and lyre!
I will wake the dawn.

¹⁰I will give thanks to you among the peoples, Lord;
I will make music to you among the nations.

¹¹For your faithful love is great — reaching to the heavens,
and your truth to the skies.

¹²Be exalted above the heavens, God!
Let your glory be over all the earth!

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. al tashchet ('do not destroy') appears in four psalm superscriptions (57, 58, 59, 75). Whether this is a melody title, a liturgical instruction, or a thematic label is uncertain. If connected to the cave narrative, it may recall David's command to his men not to destroy Saul when they had the chance (1 Samuel 24:6; 26:9). The miktam designation links this psalm to the cluster of Psalms 56-60.
2. The cave provides a physical analog for the theological image: David is literally hiding in a dark enclosed space while enemies search for him outside. The 'wings' transform the cave from a hole in the ground to the shelter of God's presence.
2. havvot ('destructions') is the same word used in Psalm 52:4 for what the wicked tongue devises. David is sheltering from the same destructive forces that the previous psalms have been naming.
3. gomer alai ('who completes/finishes concerning me') — God is not a partial actor but one who carries things to completion. The verb gamar means 'to finish, to complete, to bring to an end.' Whatever God has started in David's life, he will see it through. This anticipates Paul's confidence in Philippians 1:6.
4. The pairing of chesed ve-emet ('faithful love and truth') is one of the most common divine attribute pairs in the Hebrew Bible (Genesis 24:27, Psalm 25:10, 85:10, 89:14). The two qualities are inseparable: love without truth is sentimentality; truth without love is brutality. God's character holds both in perfect union.
5. The lion image transforms David's cave setting: he is not merely hiding in a cave — he is lying down in a lions' den. The cave that should be refuge has become a trap with predators. The tongue-as-sword image continues the thread from Psalms 52 and 55: speech is the deadliest weapon in these psalms.
6. This refrain appears again at verse 12, framing the psalm's second half. It reappears in Psalm 108:6. The prayer for God's glory over 'all the earth' expands the psalm's scope from personal rescue to cosmic reality — David's situation is a small piece of a much larger story.
7. The selah after the reversal creates a pause for the listener to absorb the justice: they dug a pit, and they fell into it. The simplicity of the reversal is its power. No elaborate mechanism is needed — evil defeats itself when God is at work.
8. nakhon from kun ('to establish, to make firm') is the opposite of mot ('to totter, to shake'). David's heart has stopped shaking. This does not mean his circumstances have changed — he is still in the cave, still hunted. But his inner condition has been established by trust.
9. The phrase a'irah shachar ('I will wake the dawn') has been one of the most beloved lines in the Psalter across traditions. It reverses the normal relationship between the singer and the morning: usually dawn wakes the sleeper. Here the worshiper wakes the dawn. Praise creates the conditions for a new day.
10. The scope expands from David alone in a cave to thanksgiving ba-ammim ('among the peoples') and ba-le'ummim ('among the nations'). David's personal praise has universal ambition — what God has done for one fugitive in a cave deserves to be proclaimed to every nation. This verse is quoted in Romans 15:9 as evidence that God's salvation was always intended to reach the Gentiles.

11. The pairing of chesed and emet with heavens and clouds creates a visual image: God's faithful love fills the entire vertical space between earth and the top of the sky. There is nowhere you can be — even in a cave — that God's love has not already reached.
12. The refrain returns unchanged, closing the psalm with the same cosmic vision that punctuated its center. The repetition is liturgical — the congregation would have known this line and joined in. The cave is forgotten; the earth is covered in glory.

58

Summary: *A psalm that indicts corrupt rulers who fail to administer justice, compares them to venomous snakes deaf to the charmer, and calls on God to shatter their power through a series of vivid destruction-images. The psalm concludes with the righteous celebrating when divine justice is vindicated.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This psalm is among the most violent in the Psalter, and that violence is not random — it is a cry against systemic injustice from those who have no access to earthly courts of appeal. The six destruction-images in verses 7-10 (broken teeth, vanishing water, blunted arrows, dissolving snails, stillborn children, thorns swept by storm) are not sadistic fantasy but the accumulated fury of people whose only recourse is God. The deaf-adder image (vv. 5-6) is psychologically precise: the corrupt judge is not ignorant of justice — he has stopped his ears against it, like a snake that deliberately refuses to hear the charmer. The corruption is willful, not accidental.*

Translation Friction: *The opening word elem (v. 2) is notoriously difficult. It could mean 'silence' (are you truly silent when justice is needed?), 'gods' (elim, addressing divine beings of Psalm 82), or 'rulers' (a metonymic use). The WLC reads elem, which most naturally yields 'silence' or 'in silence.' We follow the reading that addresses human rulers who maintain guilty silence when justice demands speech. Verse 11 (Hebrew), where the righteous 'wash their feet in the blood of the wicked,' has troubled readers throughout history. It is imprecatory language that imagines total vindication — the image is victory, not cruelty.*

Connections: *The corrupt-judge theme connects to Psalm 82, where God judges the 'gods' (rulers) who pervert justice. The deaf-snake imagery has parallels in Egyptian and Mesopotamian wisdom literature about snake-charming. The call for God to break teeth (v. 7) echoes Psalm 3:7. The righteous-rejoicing conclusion connects to the Song of Moses (Exodus 15) and the celebration after Haman's fall (Esther 8). Paul's use of 'snake venom under their lips' in Romans 3:13 draws from this psalm tradition.*

¹For the director of music. "Do Not Destroy."

A miktam of David.

²Do you rulers truly speak what is right?

Do you judge the children of humanity with equity?

³No — in your hearts you devise injustice;

on earth your hands weigh out violence.

⁴The wicked go astray from the womb;

they wander off from birth, speaking lies.

⁵Their venom is like the venom of a serpent,

like a deaf cobra that stops its ear,

⁶that will not hear the voice of charmers,

no matter how skillful the spellbinder.

⁷God, smash their teeth in their mouths!

Tear out the fangs of the young lions, LORD!

⁸Let them vanish like water that flows away;
when they draw the bow, let their arrows be blunted.

⁹Like a snail that dissolves as it goes,
like a woman's stillborn child that never sees the sun.

¹⁰Before your pots feel the heat of thorns,
whether green or ablaze — he will sweep them away!

¹¹The righteous will rejoice when they see vindication;
they will wash their feet in the blood of the wicked.

¹²And people will say,
"Yes — there is fruit for the righteous!
Yes — there is a God who judges on earth!"

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The *al tashchet* ('do not destroy') designation continues from Psalm 57, linking these psalms in a thematic cluster. The *miktam* label connects all six psalms in this group (56-60).
2. The pairing of *tsedeq* ('righteousness') and *meisharim* ('equity, uprightness') describes the two essential qualities of a just ruler: declaring what is right (*tsedeq*) and applying it fairly to all (*meisharim*). These rulers have failed at both.
3. The inversion of justice-language for violence is the psalm's key rhetorical strategy. These rulers have not abandoned the forms of justice — they still use scales (*tefallesun*) — but they have filled the scales with *chamas* ('violence') instead of *mishpat* ('justice'). The system looks functional from the outside; the contents have been switched.
4. The language parallels Psalm 51:7 (sinful from conception) but with a different purpose. David in Psalm 51 confessed his own condition in humility; here the psalmist describes the wicked's condition in accusation. *me-rechem* ('from the womb') and *mi-beten* ('from the belly/birth') indicate that their crookedness is not a late development but a lifelong orientation. *dovrei khazav* ('speakers of lies') — their defining characteristic from the start is falsehood.
5. The deaf-cobra image is not about literal snake biology (snakes lack external ears and 'hear' through ground vibrations). It draws on the cultural practice of snake-charming, well attested in Egypt and Mesopotamia. The point is behavioral: this snake has chosen not to respond. The rulers have chosen not to hear.
6. *chover chavarim* ('binder of spells') uses vocabulary from the realm of incantation and magical practice. The psalm does not endorse magic — it uses the image to make a point about the rulers' impenetrability. Even techniques designed to control the most dangerous creatures fail against willful moral deafness.
7. The teeth-breaking image appears also in Psalm 3:7 ('you strike all my enemies on the jaw; you break the teeth of the wicked'). Teeth represent power — the power to consume, to destroy, to take. Breaking teeth is removing power from those who abuse it.
8. The first of six rapid destruction-images. Water that flows away — poured on desert ground, it simply disappears. The wicked should become as irrecoverable as spilled water. Blunted arrows (*yitmolalu*, 'cut off, blunted') — even when they take hostile action (drawing the bow), their weapons fail.
9. Two more images: the *shablul* ('snail, slug') that *temes yahalokh* ('melts as it moves') — the ancient observation that a snail's trail looks like it is dissolving as it travels, leaving less of itself with every step. And the *nefel eshet* ('miscarriage, stillborn of a woman') that never sees the sun — a life that ends before it begins, that never enters the world of light and action. The stillborn image is harsh but not gratuitous: it describes a threat that never materializes, a potential for harm that is terminated before it can be realized.
10. This verse is among the most textually difficult in the Psalter. The images pile up faster than grammar can organize them. The essential point survives the difficulty: God's intervention is faster than evil's timetable. The storm arrives before the fire finishes its work.
11. *naqam* ('vindication, vengeance') in Hebrew is not personal revenge but the restoration of violated justice. When God exercises *naqam*, he is setting right what was wrong. The emotion of the righteous is not bloodlust but the deep satisfaction of seeing justice finally done after prolonged injustice.
12. The plural *shofetim* ('judging,' plural participle) with the singular *Elohim* is a known Hebrew construction where a plural form is used with God to express the fullness or intensity of the action. God judges with the combined force of all judges.

12. The psalm began by questioning whether rulers speak righteousness (v. 2); it ends by affirming that God judges righteously (v. 12). The human failure is answered by the divine success.

59

Summary: *A psalm of urgent deliverance, attributed to David when Saul sent men to watch his house in order to kill him.*

David pleads for rescue from enemies who prowl like dogs around the city at evening, snarling and howling. Two refrains structure the psalm: 'You, LORD, laugh at them' and 'They return at evening, snarling like dogs, prowling the city.' The psalm moves from desperate plea to triumphant confidence in God as fortress and faithful love.

What Makes This Remarkable: *The dog-imagery is the psalm's signature feature (vv. 7, 15). The enemies are not described as warriors or lions but as feral dogs — pack animals that scavenge at the margins of the city after dark. In the ancient Near East, dogs were not pets but despised scavengers associated with filth, disease, and shamelessness. To compare the king's soldiers to prowling dogs is to strip them of all dignity. They serve a paranoid king and do his dirty work at night, like animals foraging in garbage. The double use of this image (vv. 7 and 15) creates a structural refrain that bookends the psalm's center, but with a crucial shift: in verse 7 the dogs are threatening; by verse 15 they are merely pathetic, whimpering and unfed.*

Translation Friction: *The superscription refers to 1 Samuel 19:11, where Saul sent messengers to David's house to watch it overnight and kill him in the morning. Michal, David's wife, helped him escape through a window. The psalm's reference to 'all the nations' (v. 6, 9) seems broader than a domestic assassination attempt, leading some scholars to see the psalm as adapting a personal crisis into a national liturgy. The shift between singular and plural enemies, and between personal and international scope, may reflect this liturgical expansion.*

Connections: *The historical setting is 1 Samuel 19:11-17, where Michal lowers David through a window and deceives Saul's men with a household idol in the bed. The dog-pack imagery connects to 1 Kings 14:11, 16:4, and 21:23-24, where dogs eating the dead is the mark of the most dishonorable death. The fortress-language (misgav, 'refuge, high place') connects to Psalm 18:2 and 2 Samuel 22:3. The 'God of my faithful love' (Elohei chasdi) in verse 18 is a remarkable designation found nowhere else in the Psalter.*

¹For the director of music. "Do Not Destroy."

A miktam of David, when Saul sent men
to watch the house in order to kill him.

²Deliver me from my enemies, my God;
set me safely on high, away from those who rise against me.

³Deliver me from workers of wickedness,
and save me from men of blood.

⁴For look — they lie in ambush for my life;
fierce men gather against me.
Not for my rebellion, not for my sin, LORD!

⁵Without guilt on my part they rush and take position.
Wake up to meet me — and see!

⁶And you — LORD God of Armies,
God of Israel —
rouse yourself to punish all the nations!
Show no mercy to any treacherous evildoer.

Selah.

⁷They return at evening,
snarling like dogs,
prowling around the city.

⁸Look what pours from their mouths —
swords on their lips!
For they say, "Who is listening?"

⁹But you, LORD — you laugh at them;
you scoff at all the nations.

¹⁰My strength — I watch for you,
for God is my fortress.

¹¹My God of faithful love will come to meet me;
God will let me look in triumph on my enemies.

¹²Do not kill them, or my people will forget.
Scatter them by your power and bring them low,
Lord, our shield.

¹³The sin of their mouths, the words of their lips —
let them be caught in their pride!
For the cursing and lies they speak,

¹⁴Consume them in wrath —
consume them until they are no more!
Let them know that God rules in Jacob,
to the ends of the earth.
Selah.

¹⁵They return at evening,
snarling like dogs,
prowling around the city.

¹⁶They wander about for food;
if they are not satisfied, they howl through the night.

¹⁷But I will sing of your strength;
I will shout for joy at morning of your faithful love.
For you have been my fortress,
a refuge in the day of my distress.

¹⁸My strength — to you I will sing,
for God is my fortress,
my God of faithful love.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The third consecutive al tashchet ('do not destroy') psalm. The superscription specifies the crisis: Saul dispatched agents to surveil David's house overnight, planning to execute him at dawn (1 Samuel 19:11). The verb shamar ('to watch, to guard') — normally a positive word (God as guardian) — is here inverted: the watchers are predators, not protectors.
2. tesageveni ('set me on high, make me inaccessibly high') from sagav — to be high, to be exalted beyond reach. David asks not just for rescue but for elevation — to be placed somewhere his enemies cannot reach. The misgav ('high refuge') language that will define this psalm begins here.
3. po'alei aven ('workers of wickedness') — the same phrase from Psalm 53:5. anshei damim ('men of blood') — those whose hands are stained with bloodshed, the same phrase from Psalm 55:24. The vocabulary recycling across this psalm cluster creates a coherent picture of the enemies David faces.
4. David declares his innocence using two of the three sin-words from Psalm 51: pesha ('rebellion') and chattat ('sin'). He is not claiming perfection — he is asserting that his enemies' hostility has no just cause. Their attack is not punishment for wrongdoing but unprovoked aggression against an innocent man. The protest lo pish'i ve-lo chattati ('not my rebellion and not my sin') is a legal defense before the divine judge.
5. The enemies yerutsun ('run, rush') and yikkonanu ('prepare themselves, take position') — military language for taking battle stations. And they do this beli avon ('without guilt') — David has given them no cause. The imperative urah ('wake up!') is bold — David speaks to God as though God is sleeping through the crisis. This is not irreverence but desperation.
6. The expansion to 'all the nations' may reflect liturgical adaptation — what began as David's personal crisis became a prayer for God's cosmic justice. Alternatively, David may be placing his personal enemies within the larger framework of all who oppose God's purposes.
7. The evening timing connects to the superscription — Saul's men watched David's house overnight (1 Samuel 19:11). The dogs that prowl at dusk are these same watchers, waiting for dawn to make their kill. Michal's intervention (lowering David through the window) happened during the night these dogs were circling.
8. yabbiun ('they pour out, they gush, they belch') — their mouths overflow with violent speech. charavot be-siftotehem ('swords on their lips') — the sword-tongue image from Psalm 57:5 continues. Their confidence is grounded in the assumption mi shomea ('who is listening?') — practical atheism again (cf. Psalm 53:2). They believe no one — not God, not a higher authority — hears or cares what they say.
9. The divine laughter motif (Psalms 2:4, 37:13, 59:9) is one of the most striking anthropomorphisms in the Hebrew Bible. It expresses not emotional amusement but the absolute sovereignty of God over all human scheming. The enemies' self-importance is comic when viewed from God's throne.
10. The Qere reading is uzzu ('my strength') rather than uzzo ('his strength'). David addresses God as his strength and watches (eshmorah) for him — the same verb (shamar, 'to watch') that described the enemies watching his house in the superscription. They watch to kill; David watches for God. misgabbi ('my fortress, my high refuge') — the key word of the psalm, repeated in verses 10, 17, and 18.
11. Elohei chasdi is a hapax-level construction — the possessive 'my faithful love' applied to God creates a unique intimacy. God is not just characterized by chesed in general but is bound to David by a specific, personal, covenantal faithful love.
12. This verse contains sophisticated theological reasoning about the purpose of divine judgment. Total destruction erases evidence; prolonged diminishment provides ongoing testimony. David wants his people to see the consequences play out over time so that the lesson becomes unforgettable.
13. The mouth-sin catalogue continues: chattat pimo ('the sin of their mouths'), devar sefateimo ('the word of their lips'), ge'onam ('their pride'), alah ('cursing, oath-breaking'), and kachash ('lies, denial'). The trap-vocabulary from Psalm 57:7 recurs: yillakhedu ('let them be caught') — their own words will become the net that ensnares them.
14. The doubled kalleh ('consume, finish off') intensifies the plea. But the purpose is not destruction for its own sake — it is revelation: ve-yed'u ('and let them know'). The goal of judgment is knowledge: ki Elohim moshel be-Ya'akov ('that God rules in Jacob'). The scope: le-afsei ha-arets ('to the ends of the earth'). God's rule over Jacob (Israel) has universal implications — what he does for his covenant people declares his sovereignty everywhere.
15. The structural repetition of the refrain (vv. 7 and 15) is a deliberate literary technique. The listener hears the same words but understands them differently because of everything that has happened between the two occurrences. This is how trust transforms perception without changing circumstances.
16. The dogs are now scavengers — yenu'u le-ekhol ('they wander for food'), searching for scraps. The mighty soldiers have become hungry strays. im lo yisbe'u vayyalinu ('if they are not satisfied, they spend the night howling') — unsatisfied dogs whimpering in the dark. The transformation from threatening to pathetic is complete.
17. The morning-singing in contrast to evening-prowling creates the psalm's final structural pair: darkness/light, dogs/singer, snarling/praise. David has survived the night. The dawn that Psalm 57:9 promised to wake is here.
18. The inclusio between verses 10 and 18 (both using uzzu, 'my strength,' and misgabbi, 'my fortress') closes the psalm in a ring structure. Everything between the two statements — the dogs, the laughter, the scattering, the consuming — is enclosed within the frame of 'God is my fortress.' The frame holds.

60

Summary: *A national lament following military defeat, attributed to David's wars against Aram and Edom. The psalm begins with anguished complaint that God has rejected and broken his people, then transitions into a divine oracle in which God claims sovereignty over the entire land, and concludes with renewed trust that God will grant victory despite apparent abandonment.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This psalm contains one of the most striking divine speeches in the Psalter (vv. 8-10). God speaks from his sanctuary and divides the land like a general assigning territory: Shechem, Succoth, Gilead, Manasseh, Ephraim, Judah, Moab, Edom, Philistia — all are his to distribute. The language is deliberately domestic and even humorous: Moab is God's washbasin, over Edom he flings his sandal, and Philistia is told to shout in submission. The imagery reduces Israel's most feared enemies to household objects and servants. God is not intimidated by geopolitics; he treats international powers the way a householder treats his washbasin and his shoes. The theological audacity is breathtaking — and it comes in a psalm of defeat, when the evidence points in the opposite direction.*

Translation Friction: *The superscription is one of the longest and most historically detailed in the Psalter, connecting the psalm to David's campaigns in 2 Samuel 8 and 1 Chronicles 18. The military details do not perfectly align with the biblical narratives, suggesting either a different tradition or a composite historical reference. The phrase shushan edut ('lily of testimony') may be a melody name or a reference to a specific liturgical occasion. Verses 7-14 (Hebrew) are reused almost verbatim in Psalm 108:7-14, confirming that psalm sections circulated as independent units.*

Connections: *The military background connects to 2 Samuel 8:1-14 (David's victories over Moab, Aram, and Edom) and 2 Samuel 10 (the Aramean wars). The divine oracle dividing the land echoes the territorial allocations of Joshua 13-21. Psalm 108:7-14 reuses the oracle and concluding verses. The 'wine of staggering' image (v. 5) appears in Isaiah 51:17, 22 and Jeremiah 25:15. The fortified city (v. 11) likely refers to the Edomite stronghold of Bozrah or Sela (Petra).*

¹For the director of music. According to "Lily of Testimony."

A miktam of David, for instruction.

²When he fought against Aram-Naharaim and Aram-Zobah,
and Joab returned and struck down Edom
in the Valley of Salt — twelve thousand.

³God, you have rejected us, broken through our lines;
you were angry — restore us!

⁴You have shaken the land and split it open;
heal its fractures, for it totters.

⁵You have shown your people harsh things;
you have made us drink wine that staggers.

⁶You have given those who fear you a banner
to rally around, because of truth.
Selah.

⁷So that your beloved ones may be rescued,
save with your right hand and answer me!

⁸God has spoken in his sanctuary:
 "I will triumph! I will divide up Shechem
 and measure out the Valley of Succoth.

⁹Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine;
 Ephraim is my helmet,
 Judah is my scepter.

¹⁰Moab is my washbasin;
 over Edom I fling my sandal.
 Shout in submission, Philistia!"

¹¹Who will bring me to the fortified city?
 Who will lead me to Edom?

¹²Have you not rejected us, God?
 You do not march out with our armies, God.

¹³Give us help against the enemy,
 for human salvation is worthless.

¹⁴With God we will act with valor,
 and he himself will trample our enemies.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. shushan edut ('lily of testimony') is unique to this psalm and Psalm 80 (where the plural shoshannim edut appears). Whether this names a melody, a musical instrument, or a liturgical season is unknown. The word lelammedh ('for instruction, to teach') indicates the psalm was intended as a teaching tool — the congregation was meant to learn something from it, not merely sing it.
2. The superscription provides the military context: simultaneous campaigns against the Aramean kingdoms to the northeast (Aram-Naharaim, 'Aram of the Two Rivers,' upper Mesopotamia; Aram-Zobah, a kingdom in modern Lebanon/Syria) and Edom to the southeast. Joab's strike against Edom in the Valley of Salt (south of the Dead Sea) killed 12,000. The text of 2 Samuel 8:13 credits David with 18,000 Edomites; the discrepancy may reflect different battle counts from the same campaign.
3. The raw honesty of blaming God for military defeat is characteristic of Israelite lament. The psalms do not protect God from accusation — they bring the accusation directly to God because God is the only one who can reverse the situation. Complaint is an act of faith: you only accuse someone you believe has the power to change things.
4. The land-as-body metaphor — shaken, broken, needing healing — connects to the prophetic tradition where the land suffers for the people's sin or flourishes with their faithfulness (Hosea 4:1-3, Isaiah 24:4-6). The land is not just territory but a participant in the covenant relationship.
5. The wine-of-staggering image is part of a broader biblical tradition of the 'cup of God's wrath' — a metaphor where divine judgment is figured as an intoxicating drink that the recipient must consume. The image will reach its fullest development in Revelation 14:10 and 16:19.
6. The nes ('banner') will become a messianic image in Isaiah 11:10, 12 ('he will raise a banner for the nations'). In this context it is a military signal — the point of hope around which the scattered can regroup.
7. yedidekha ('your beloved ones') from yadid ('beloved, dear one') — the same root in the name Jedidiah, the name God gave Solomon through Nathan (2 Samuel 12:25). Israel is identified as God's beloved — the relationship is not contractual but affectional. The right hand (yamin) is the hand of power and action throughout the Hebrew Bible.
8. The oracle (vv. 8-10) is one of the few places in the Psalms where God speaks directly in first person. The format resembles a prophetic oracle delivered in a worship setting — possibly by a priest or prophet during a liturgy of lament. The claim of sovereignty over specific territories gives the oracle concrete, geographic content.
9. mechoqeq ('lawgiver, commander's staff, scepter') connects to Jacob's blessing of Judah in Genesis 49:10 ('the scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet'). God's designation of Judah as 'my scepter' confirms the Davidic royal line as God's chosen instrument of governance.

10. The domestic imagery is deliberately humiliating to Israel's enemies and deliberately comforting to Israel. In a psalm of military defeat, God's oracle declares that the enemies who seem so powerful are, from God's perspective, household objects. The humor is theological: panic about geopolitics is disproportionate when God treats your enemies as his washbasin.
10. The sandal-over-Edom gesture may also allude to the master-servant relationship: in ancient custom, a servant's job was to carry the master's sandals. God flings his sandal over Edom, treating it as his servant.
11. The fortified city of Edom was likely Sela (later Petra), a city carved into sandstone cliffs that was nearly impregnable by ancient military standards. The question 'who will bring me there?' is not rhetorical — it is a genuine military problem. Only God can crack that fortress.
12. The honesty of this verse is remarkable in a liturgical text. The psalm does not pretend things are fine. God's absence from the battlefield is stated as fact, not questioned as possibility. The psalm holds together divine sovereignty (God rules all nations in the oracle) and present divine absence (God does not march with the army). Both are true at the same time.
13. teshu'at adam ('human salvation') is dismissed with the strongest possible term. shav does not mean 'second-best' or 'partial' — it means empty, nothing, vapor. Human help is not a lesser option; it is no option at all when God is the one who determines the outcome.
14. The psalm's theological arc is complete: defeat (vv. 3-5) rallying point (v. 6) divine oracle of sovereignty (vv. 8-10) honest acknowledgment of present weakness (vv. 11-13) trust in God's future action (v. 14). The trajectory is not from despair to resolution but from despair to trust. The fortified city of Edom remains unconquered. But God has spoken, and that is enough.

61

Summary: *Psalm 61 is a prayer of longing from a place of distance and emotional exhaustion. The psalmist cries out to God from the 'end of the earth' — a phrase expressing not geography but the feeling of being at the furthest point from safety. He asks to be led to a rock too high for him to reach on his own, acknowledging that God has been his refuge and strong tower. The psalm then shifts to prayers for the king's life and reign, asking that faithful love and truth guard him. It closes with a vow of perpetual praise.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The image of a rock 'higher than I' is theologically precise — the psalmist does not ask to climb to safety by his own effort but to be led there by God. The refuge is real but inaccessible without divine help. The shift from personal lament to royal prayer suggests either a king praying about himself in the third person or a worshiper whose personal security is bound up with the king's welfare. The tent and wings imagery collapses the distance between the earthly tabernacle and the protective presence of God.*

Translation Friction: *The superscription attributes this psalm to David with stringed instruments (neginot). The phrase 'from the end of the earth' has been debated — does it reflect literal exile, a military campaign far from Jerusalem, or metaphorical despair? The royal petition in verses 7-8 raises questions about whether this is a personal psalm repurposed for liturgical use or originally composed for royal worship. The Hebrew of verse 3 is ambiguous: 'when my heart is faint' could also be rendered 'when my heart is wrapped, overwhelmed.'*

Connections: *The 'rock higher than I' connects to the repeated Old Testament image of God as rock (Deuteronomy 32:4, 2 Samuel 22:2-3, Psalm 18:2). The tent of God's presence echoes the tabernacle tradition and looks forward to the promise that God will shelter his people (Psalm 91:1-4). The vow of daily praise anticipates the theology of perpetual worship developed in later psalms and in Revelation 4-5.*

¹For the director of music. On stringed instruments. Of David.

²Hear my cry, God;
pay attention to my prayer.

³From the far edge of the land I call out to you
when my heart is overwhelmed —
lead me to the rock that towers above me.

⁴For you have been my refuge,
a strong tower against the enemy.

⁵Let me dwell in your tent forever;
let me take shelter in the hiding place of your wings. Selah.

⁶For you, God, have heard my vows;
you have granted the inheritance of those who revere your name.

⁷Add days upon the king's days;
let his years span generation after generation.

⁸May he sit enthroned before God forever;
appoint faithful love and truth to guard him.

⁹Then I will make music to your name forever,
fulfilling my vows day after day.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The superscription lam-natseach ('for the director, for the one who leads') assigns this psalm to liturgical performance. Neginot refers to stringed instruments, suggesting an accompanied setting.
2. The word rinnah ('cry, ringing cry') denotes a loud, urgent vocalization — not a whisper but a shout of distress. The parallel verb haqshivah ('give ear, pay attention') intensifies the plea.
3. The verb ba-atof ('when it is faint, when it is wrapped over, overwhelmed') describes a heart that is collapsing inward under the weight of distress. The rock (tsur) is one of the primary divine metaphors in the Psalter — solid, immovable, and elevated beyond human reach.
4. The word machseh ('refuge, shelter') conveys protection from storm and danger. The 'strong tower' (migdal oz) is a military image — a fortified tower from which one can withstand siege. Together these images ground the psalmist's future hope in past experience of God's protection.
5. The verb agurah ('let me sojourn, let me dwell as a guest') carries the nuance of being welcomed into someone else's space — the psalmist does not claim ownership of God's tent but asks to be received as a guest. Selah marks a musical or liturgical pause.
6. The 'vows' (nedaray) indicate the psalmist has made formal commitments to God, likely vows of praise in exchange for deliverance. The 'inheritance' (yerushat) of those who fear God's name is the shared portion of the faithful — belonging to God's people and participating in his promises.
7. The petition shifts to the king. The request for long life (yamim al yemey melekh toshif) is standard royal prayer language in the ancient Near East. 'Generation after generation' (kemo dor va-dor) is hyperbolic, expressing a wish for dynastic continuity rather than literal immortality.
8. The verb yeshev ('let him sit, let him dwell') can mean both 'dwell' and 'sit enthroned.' The verb man yintseruhu is difficult — man is likely an imperative 'appoint' or 'assign,' asking God to station chesed and emet as the king's personal guard.
9. The psalm closes with a commitment to perpetual praise — azammerah ('I will make music, sing praise') and the daily fulfillment of vows (yom yom, 'day by day'). The vow structure is complete: the psalmist made promises to God, God heard them, and now the psalmist commits to keeping them through ongoing worship.

62

Summary: Psalm 62 is a meditation on waiting silently for God alone. The psalmist declares that his soul rests in silence before God, who is his rock, salvation, and fortress. Enemies plot to bring him down from his high position, using flattery and hidden curses. Yet twice the psalmist returns to the refrain of silent trust. He warns against trusting in oppression, robbery, or wealth, and closes with a double declaration: power belongs to God, and faithful love belongs to God, and God repays each person according to what they have done.

What Makes This Remarkable: *The word ak ('surely, only, alone') appears six times in this psalm, giving it a distinctive theological rhythm. Each occurrence narrows the field of trust until God is the only thing left standing. The two refrains (verses 2-3 and 6-7) are nearly identical but with a crucial shift: in verse 2 'I will not be greatly shaken,' in verse 6 'I will not be shaken' — the qualifier is removed. Silence before God deepens into more complete confidence. The final two verses deliver the psalm's theology in concentrated form: God possesses both oz (power, strength) and chesed (faithful love). These are not in tension but held together in one being.*

Translation Friction: *The superscription assigns this to David with the notation al Yedutun, likely indicating a musical tradition or choir associated with Jeduthun (one of David's three chief musicians). The identity of the enemies in verses 4-5 is unspecified — they use blessing as a cover for cursing, which suggests political rather than military opposition. The meaning of 'silence' (dumiyyah) has been debated: is it passive waiting, active stillness, or a deliberate refusal to seek human help? The psalm seems to intend all three. The weighing metaphor in verse 10 (men are lighter than a breath on the scales) echoes wisdom traditions and anticipates the Egyptian imagery of judgment scales.*

Connections: *The 'rock' and 'fortress' language connects to David's earlier experiences in the wilderness (1 Samuel 23-24, Psalm 18). The warning against trusting riches anticipates Jesus' teaching about wealth (Matthew 6:19-21, Luke 12:13-21). The declaration that God repays each person according to their deeds appears in Proverbs 24:12, Jeremiah 17:10, and Romans 2:6. Paul's quotation shows this psalm's theology reaching into the New Testament understanding of divine justice.*

¹For the director of music. According to Jeduthun. A psalm of David.

²My soul waits in silence for God alone;
from him comes my deliverance.

³He alone is my rock and my deliverance,
my high fortress — I will not be greatly shaken.

⁴How long will all of you attack a man?
You will be crushed —
all of you — like a leaning wall,
like a fence about to collapse.

⁵They scheme only to bring him down from his position;
they take pleasure in deception.
With their mouths they bless,
but inside they curse. Selah.

⁶My soul, wait in silence for God alone,
for my hope comes from him.

⁷He alone is my rock and my deliverance,
my high fortress — I will not be shaken.

⁸On God rest my deliverance and my glory;
my mighty rock, my refuge, is in God.

⁹pour out your hearts before him.
Trust in him at all times, you people;
God is a refuge for us. Selah.

¹⁰Common people are only a breath;
important people are a lie.
Placed on scales, together they rise —
they weigh less than a breath.

¹¹Do not trust in extortion;
do not put empty hope in robbery.
If wealth increases,
do not set your heart on it.

¹²One thing God has spoken;
two things I have heard:
that power belongs to God,

¹³and that faithful love belongs to you, Lord,
for you repay each person
according to what they have done.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Jeduthun (Yedutun) was one of three chief musicians appointed by David (1 Chronicles 25:1-3). The notation 'according to Jeduthun' likely indicates a musical style, tune, or performance tradition associated with his guild.
2. The word *dumiyyah* is related to the verb *damam* ('be silent, be still'). It appears in Psalm 65:2 as well: 'To you silence is praise.' Here it describes the inner posture of the soul before God — waiting without agitation, complaint, or frantic searching for alternatives.
3. The qualifier *rabbah* ('greatly') is significant — the psalmist acknowledges he may be shaken but not overwhelmed. This honest admission is removed in the second refrain (verse 7), suggesting that the act of meditating on God's sufficiency has deepened the psalmist's confidence.
4. The verb *tehotetu* ('you set upon, you rush against, you assault') describes a coordinated attack against a single person. The images of a leaning wall (*qir natuy*) and a tottering fence (*gader ha-dechuyah*) are applied to the attackers themselves — they think they are strong, but they are structurally unsound and about to fall.
5. The word *mis-seto* ('from his elevation, from his dignity') suggests the target holds a position of honor that the conspirators want to dismantle. The contrast between outward blessing and inward cursing (*be-fiv yevarekhu u-ve-qirbam yeqalelu*) describes political duplicity — flattery as a weapon.
6. The second refrain shifts from declaration ('my soul waits') to self-command ('my soul, wait!'). The psalmist is preaching to himself, redirecting his own attention back to God after describing the threat of his enemies. The word *tiqvah* ('hope, expectation') replaces *yeshuah* ('deliverance') from verse 2, broadening the scope from immediate rescue to comprehensive expectation.
7. The critical difference from verse 3: the word *rabbah* ('greatly') is removed. In verse 3, 'I will not be greatly shaken.' Here, 'I will not be shaken' — period. The qualifier has been stripped away. The act of silent waiting before God has produced deeper confidence.
8. The psalmist now claims that even his *kavod* ('glory, honor, weight') depends on God. This is a striking admission for someone under attack — his social standing, his reputation, his significance are not self-generated but God-given. The stacking of titles (rock of strength, refuge) emphasizes comprehensive dependence.
9. The psalm shifts from personal meditation to public exhortation. The verb *shifkhu* ('pour out') is vivid — it is the verb used for pouring out water or blood. The heart is to be emptied before God completely, holding nothing back. This communal instruction (*am*, 'people') transforms private trust into shared worship.
10. The distinction between *bney adam* and *bney ish* is social — the first refers to ordinary people, the second to people of rank or importance. The scales (*moznayim*) are a weighing instrument associated with justice and evaluation. The verb *la-alot* ('to go up') means they rise on the scale because they are so light — less than *hevel*, less than breath.
11. Three prohibitions in sequence: do not trust oppression (*osheq*), do not find significance in robbery (*gazel*), and do not attach your heart to increasing wealth (*chayil*). The verb *tehbalu* ('become empty, become vain') shares the same root as *hevel* — trusting in robbery makes a person as insubstantial as the breath described in the previous verse.
12. The 'one... two' formula (*achat... shtayim*) is a Hebrew numerical pattern used in wisdom literature (Proverbs 30:15, 18, 21) to introduce a definitive statement. God's single utterance contains a double truth: power and faithful love. The division of the single speech into two heard truths happens in the listener's understanding — God speaks unity; we perceive aspects.

13. The word *chesed* ('faithful love') is the psalm's final key term, paired with *oz* ('power') from the previous verse. The verb *teshallem* ('you repay, you complete, you render') implies that God brings each person's actions to their appropriate conclusion. This is not cold retribution but the faithful outworking of a God who is both strong and loving.

63

Summary: *Psalm 63 is one of the most intensely personal expressions of desire for God in the entire Psalter. Set in a dry and waterless wilderness, the psalmist's body itself thirsts and yearns for God the way parched land craves rain. He recalls beholding God's power and glory in the sanctuary, declares that God's faithful love is better than life, and resolves to praise God with lifted hands. In the night watches he meditates on God and finds satisfaction as rich as a feast. The psalm closes with confidence that those who seek his life will be destroyed, while the king will rejoice in God.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The opening line 'My soul thirsts for you' stands as one of the defining statements of biblical spirituality. What makes it remarkable is that thirst is involuntary — the psalmist is not choosing to want God; he cannot stop wanting God. The body language of the psalm is extraordinary: flesh faints, lips praise, hands lift, the soul clings, God's right hand holds. The entire person — body and spirit — is engaged in this desire. The statement that God's faithful love is 'better than life' is among the most radical value claims in Scripture. It does not say God's love makes life better; it says God's love outranks life itself.*

Translation Friction: *The superscription places this psalm in the wilderness of Judah, traditionally connected to David's flight from Saul (1 Samuel 23-24) or from Absalom (2 Samuel 15-17). The wilderness setting may be literal or metaphorical — any experience of God's absence feels like a desert. The mention of the king in verse 12 has led some scholars to identify this as a royal psalm, though others see it as a later addition. The violent imagery of verses 10-11 (enemies given to the sword, becoming food for jackals) contrasts sharply with the intimate devotion of the earlier verses, but the contrast is intentional: the one who clings to God with such intensity also expects God to deal decisively with those who threaten his life.*

Connections: *The thirst imagery connects to Psalm 42:1-2 ('As a deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, God') and to Jesus' words at the feast: 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink' (John 7:37). The wilderness setting echoes Israel's desert experience where God provided water from the rock (Exodus 17, Numbers 20). The phrase 'your right hand upholds me' anticipates Isaiah 41:10 ('I will uphold you with my righteous right hand'). Early Christians adopted this psalm for morning prayer because of the phrase 'early I seek you' (shachar, dawn).*

¹A psalm by David, composed during his time in the Judean wilderness.

²God — you are my God; at dawn I search for you.

My soul thirsts for you;
my flesh yearns for you
in a dry and exhausted land
where there is no water.

³So I have gazed on you in the sanctuary,
beholding your power and your glory.

⁴Because your faithful love is better than life,
my lips will praise you.

⁵So I will bless you as long as I live;
in your name I will lift up my hands.

⁶My soul will be satisfied as with rich food and fat;
my mouth will praise you with joyful lips.

⁷When I remember you on my bed,
I meditate on you through the night watches.

⁸For you have been my help,
and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.

⁹My soul clings to you;
your right hand holds me up.

¹⁰But those who seek my life to destroy it
will go down into the depths of the earth.

¹¹They will be poured out by the power of the sword;
they will become food for jackals.

¹²But the king will rejoice in God;
everyone who swears by him will celebrate,
for the mouth of liars will be shut.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The superscription anchors this psalm to a specific setting — the midbar Yehudah, the arid wasteland east of the Judean hill country descending toward the Dead Sea. This landscape provides the controlling metaphor for the entire psalm: spiritual longing described through physical desolation.
2. The verb *kamah* ('yearns, faints, longs') is rare in the Hebrew Bible (appearing only here and in Psalm 84:3). It describes a physical craving so intense that the body weakens. The phrase *be-erets tsiyyah ve-ayef beli mayim* ('in a land of dryness and exhaustion without water') layers three deprivation terms: dryness, exhaustion, waterlessness.
3. The word *ken* ('so, thus, in this way') connects the wilderness longing to a prior experience in the sanctuary — the psalmist has seen God's power (*oz*) and glory (*kavod*) in the temple, and now in the desert he craves that experience again. The verb *chazitikha* ('I have gazed at you, beheld you') suggests a visionary encounter, not casual observation.
4. The comparative *ki tov chasdekha me-chayyim* ('because your faithful love is better than life') uses the simple comparative structure: your *chesed* exceeds life. The plural *chayyim* ('lives, life') intensifies the claim — not just one life but life in its fullness is outranked by God's covenant love.
5. The posture of lifted hands (*essa khappay*) is the standard gesture of prayer and worship in ancient Israel — open palms raised toward heaven, simultaneously an act of vulnerability and reception. The commitment *be-chayyay* ('in my life, while I live') makes praise a lifelong practice.
6. The comparison to *chelev va-deshen* ('fat and richness') uses the language of the finest portion of a sacrificial meal — the fat was considered the choicest part, reserved for God in the Levitical system. The psalmist experiences God's presence as a feast that fills the deepest hunger. The phrase *siftei renanot* ('lips of joyful shouts') combines the mouth's two functions: eating and singing.
7. The *ashmurot* ('watches') were the divisions of the night — the Israelites divided the night into three watches. The verb *ehgeh* ('I meditate, I murmur') is the same word used in Psalm 1:2 for meditating on Torah. Here the object of meditation is God himself. The bed (*yetsu'ay*, 'my couch') is the place of vulnerability and honesty, where pretense falls away.
8. The 'shadow of your wings' (*betsel kenafekha*) appears repeatedly in the Psalms (17:8, 36:8, 57:2, 61:5) as an image of intimate divine protection. The verb *aranen* ('I sing for joy, I shout with delight') expresses unrestrained gladness — not quiet contentment but vocal celebration.
9. The verb *davaq* is one of the strongest attachment words in Hebrew. It appears in Deuteronomy as a command to 'cling to the LORD your God' (Deuteronomy 10:20, 11:22, 13:5). The right hand (*yamin*) symbolizes strength, favor, and active intervention throughout the Hebrew Bible.
10. The phrase *le-shoah yevaqshu nafshi* ('they seek my soul/life for destruction') identifies enemies who want not just defeat but annihilation. The 'depths of the earth' (*tachtiyyot ha-arets*) refers to Sheol, the realm of the dead — those who pursue the psalmist's death will find death themselves.
11. The verb *yagiruhu* ('they will pour him out') uses the imagery of blood being poured out. The *shu'alim* ('foxes' or more likely 'jackals') were scavengers that fed on the unburied dead — to become food for jackals meant dying without proper burial, the ultimate disgrace in the ancient Near East.

12. The king's rejoicing connects this personal psalm to the royal sphere. The phrase 'everyone who swears by him' (kol ha-nishba bo) could refer to those who swear by God or those who swear allegiance to the king. The silencing of liars (yissaker pi dovrey shaqer) provides closure — deceptive speech, the weapon of the psalmist's enemies, will finally be stopped.

64

Summary: *Psalm 64 is a prayer against enemies whose primary weapon is speech. The psalmist asks God to protect his life from the conspiracy of evildoers who sharpen their tongues like swords and aim bitter words like arrows at the blameless. They encourage each other in evil, lay secret traps, and say 'Who can see us?' The psalm pivots dramatically: God shoots his own arrow at them suddenly, and they stumble over their own tongues. All who see it take notice and declare what God has done. The righteous rejoice and take refuge in the LORD.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The psalm operates on a precise reversal structure. The enemies sharpen their tongues; God shoots an arrow. The enemies attack suddenly (pit'om, verse 5); God strikes suddenly (pit'om, verse 8). The enemies aim at the blameless; God aims at the enemies. Their tongues were their weapon, and their tongues become their downfall. The question 'Who can see us?' assumes invisibility before God, and the answer comes not as an argument but as an act — God sees and strikes. The structural symmetry is itself the theological argument: what you do will be done to you.*

Translation Friction: *The superscription simply attributes this to David as 'a psalm' without a specific historical setting. The identity of the enemies is kept general — they are characterized entirely by their speech acts (plotting, sharpening tongues, aiming bitter words, encouraging each other in evil, hiding traps). This generality has made the psalm applicable to many situations of slander and conspiracy throughout Jewish and Christian history. The verb in verse 9 (va-yakkidu) has been translated 'they will make him stumble' or 'they wag [the head]' — the uncertainty affects whether the subject is God causing them to stumble or onlookers shaking their heads.*

Connections: *The image of the tongue as a sword appears throughout wisdom literature (Proverbs 12:18, 25:18) and in James 3:1-12. The sudden reversal of the wicked echoes Proverbs 26:27 ('Whoever digs a pit will fall into it'). The question 'Who can see us?' connects to Psalm 10:11 and 94:7, where the wicked assume God is absent or inattentive — a recurring challenge that the Psalms consistently refute.*

¹For the director of music. A psalm of David.

²Hear my voice, God, in my complaint;
preserve my life from the dread of the enemy.

³Hide me from the conspiracy of those who do evil,
from the noisy mob of wrongdoers.

⁴They sharpen their tongues like swords;
they aim their arrows — bitter words —

⁵to shoot from hiding at the blameless.
Suddenly they shoot, and they do not fear.

⁶They strengthen each other in an evil plan;
they talk about hiding their traps.
They say, "Who can see us?"

⁷They devise injustice after injustice;
they complete their carefully searched-out scheme.
The inner mind and heart of a person run deep.

⁸But God shoots an arrow at them —
suddenly their wounds appear.

⁹Their own tongue is turned against them;
all who see them shake their heads.

¹⁰Then all people stand in awe
and declare what God has done;
they understand his work.

¹¹The righteous one rejoices in the LORD
and takes refuge in him;
all the upright in heart celebrate.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. A standard superscription assigning authorship and liturgical direction.
2. The word *siychi* ('my complaint, my meditation, my concern') indicates troubled reflection — the psalmist is bringing his anxiety to God. The phrase *mi-pachad oyev* ('from the fear/dread of the enemy') asks for protection not only from the enemy but from the paralyzing fear that the enemy produces.
3. The word *sod* ('secret counsel, conspiracy, intimate council') suggests coordinated plotting rather than random hostility. The word *rigshah* ('turmoil, noisy crowd, commotion') describes the agitated energy of a mob — evil is both secret in its planning and loud in its execution.
4. The tongue-as-sword and word-as-arrow metaphors compress violence into speech. The verb *shanenu* ('they sharpen, they whet') is the same verb used for sharpening a blade. The verb *darkhu* ('they tread, they bend') refers to stepping on a bow to string it — preparing for attack. The 'arrow' is then identified: *davar mar* ('a bitter word').
5. The blameless person (*tam*) is ambushed from concealment (*ba-mistarim*). The word *pit'om* ('suddenly') will reappear in verse 8 when God returns the sudden strike. The phrase *ve-lo yira'u* ('and they do not fear') indicates the attackers feel no accountability — they believe they act unseen.
6. The question *mi yireh lamo* is the theological heart of the enemies' error. They assume their secrecy is absolute. The psalm will demonstrate that God's vision penetrates every hiding place.
7. The verse is textually difficult. The verb *yachpesu* ('they search out, they devise') and the noun *chefes* ('search, scheme') emphasize the thoroughness of the conspiracy — this is not impulsive evil but researched, deliberate plotting. The closing line (*ve-qerev ish ve-lev ameq*, 'and the inner part of a person and the heart is deep') may be the psalmist's observation that human scheming is unfathomable — but not to God.
8. The repetition of *pit'om* ('suddenly') in both verse 5 and verse 8 creates the psalm's structural hinge. What the wicked did to others, God does to them, using the same speed and the same element of surprise.
9. The tongue (*lashon*), which was the enemies' primary weapon (verse 4), now becomes the instrument of their downfall. The verb *yitnodedu* ('they shake, they wag, they flee') describes the reaction of onlookers — either shaking their heads in amazement or recoiling from the spectacle of divine judgment.
10. The verb *va-yir'u* ('they fear, they stand in awe') answers the enemies' claim 'Who can see us?' (verse 6). The answer: everyone sees, and everyone understands. The verb *hiskilu* ('they understand, they act with insight') indicates this is not mere observation but comprehension — the witnesses grasp the meaning of what God has done.
11. The psalm closes with three responses: joy (*yismach*), refuge (*chasah*), and celebration (*yithallelu*). The phrase *yishrey lev* ('upright of heart') describes those whose inner orientation is straight — the opposite of the 'deep heart' of the schemers in verse 7. Integrity of heart leads to joy; depth of scheming leads to ruin.

65

Summary: *Psalm 65 is a hymn of praise to the God who answers prayer, forgives transgression, and saturates the earth with abundance. It moves through three zones of divine activity: the temple (where praise waits and vows are fulfilled), the cosmic arena (where God stills the roaring seas and silences the tumult of nations), and the agricultural landscape (where God waters the furrows, softens the soil with rain, and crowns the year with goodness so that even the wilderness pastures drip and the hills wrap themselves in joy). The psalm is an integrated vision of God's work from altar to field.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The progression from temple to creation to harvest makes this psalm a comprehensive theology of divine provision. God does not merely rule from a distance — he works the soil. The image in verse 10 of God 'visiting the earth and saturating it' uses agricultural language for divine attention: God tends the world the way a farmer tends a field. The closing images are extraordinary: wagon tracks drip with abundance, pastures are clothed with flocks, and valleys are covered with grain so thick they 'shout for joy and sing.' The entire landscape becomes a congregation.*

Translation Friction: *The superscription identifies this as a psalm and song of David. Some scholars date it later based on the reference to the temple ('your courts,' verse 5) and the harvest thanksgiving theme. The Hebrew of verse 2 is debated: 'Praise waits silently for you' (dumiyyah tehillah) is an unusual construction — silence as a form of praise. Verse 4 may refer to election ('blessed is the one you choose and bring near') in a priestly or more general sense. The agricultural imagery of verses 10-14 is so specific that some scholars read this as a response to a particular abundant harvest rather than a general thanksgiving.*

Connections: *The forgiveness of transgressions (verse 4) connects to the Day of Atonement traditions (Leviticus 16). The stilling of the seas (verse 8) echoes the creation narrative (Genesis 1:9-10) and the crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 14-15). The vision of the earth producing abundance through divine watering anticipates Isaiah's vision of the desert blooming (Isaiah 35) and the new creation imagery of Revelation 22. Jesus' parable of the sower (Matthew 13) assumes this same theology of God-given agricultural abundance.*

¹For the director of music. A psalm of David. A song.

²Praise waits silently for you, God, in Zion,
and to you the vow will be fulfilled.

³You who hear prayer —
to you all flesh will come.

⁴When the weight of wrongdoing overpowers me,
you cover over our rebellions.

⁵Blessed is the one you choose and bring near
to dwell in your courts.
We will be satisfied with the goodness of your house,
the holiness of your temple.

⁶With awesome deeds of righteousness you answer us,
God of our deliverance,
you who are the confidence of all the far ends of the earth
and the distant seas.

⁷He sets the mountains in place by his power,
girded with strength.

⁸He stills the roaring of the seas,
the roaring of their waves,
and the uproar of the nations.

⁹Those who live at the farthest edges stand in awe at your signs;
you make the gateways of morning and evening shout for joy.

¹⁰You visit the earth and saturate it;
you enrich it abundantly.
The stream of God is full of water;
you prepare their grain,
for this is how you have prepared the earth.

¹¹You drench its furrows;
you press down its ridges.
With showers you soften it;
you bless what sprouts from it.

¹²You crown the year with your goodness,
and your wagon tracks drip with abundance.

¹³The wilderness pastures drip with moisture,
and the hills wrap themselves in joy.

¹⁴The meadows are clothed with flocks;
the valleys are wrapped in grain.
They shout for joy — yes, they sing!

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The double designation *mizmor* ('psalm') and *shir* ('song') may indicate a piece that combines instrumental performance with vocal singing.
2. The word *dumiyyah* ('silence, stillness') also appears in Psalm 62:2. Here it modifies *tehillah* ('praise') — silence as the form praise takes when it is most reverent. Zion as the location centers this psalm in the worship life of Jerusalem.
3. God is addressed as *shomea tefillah* ('the one who hears prayer') — a participial title that defines God's character by his responsiveness. The scope is universal: *kol basar* ('all flesh') will come to this prayer-hearing God. The psalm envisions a worship that extends beyond Israel to encompass all humanity.
4. The shift from singular 'me' (*menni*) to plural 'our' (*pesha'enu*) moves from personal to communal confession. The verb *gavru* ('they overpower, they are too strong') acknowledges that sin is stronger than the sinner — human effort cannot deal with it. The verb *tekhaprem* ('you cover them, you atone for them') is the verbal root of *kippur* (atonement). Only God can handle what has overpowered the psalmist.
5. The verbs *tivchar* ('you choose') and *utqarev* ('you bring near') place the initiative with God — access to divine presence is by invitation, not achievement. The satisfaction (*nisbe'ah*) that comes from the 'goodness of your house' (*tuv betekha*) uses the same satisfaction language as Psalm 63:6 — presence as feast.
6. The word *nora'ot* ('awesome things, fearsome acts') describes God's answers to prayer as overwhelming in their power. These answers come *be-tsedeq* ('in/with righteousness') — God's intervention is both powerful and just. The scope expands outward: God is the trust (*mivtach*) of people at the remotest edges of earth and sea.
7. The verb *mekhin* ('he establishes, he sets in place') describes the mountains as God's deliberate construction. The image of God being 'girded with strength' (*ne'zar bi-gevurah*) presents God as a warrior whose belt is raw power — the same power that anchors mountains in bedrock.
8. Three things are quieted by the same divine action: the seas (*yammim*), their waves (*galleyhem*), and the nations (*le'ummim*). The parallelism equates cosmic chaos with political turmoil — God subdues both with the same authority. The verb *mashbiach* ('he stills, he silences') describes decisive calming.

9. The 'uttermost parts' (qetsavot) are the extreme margins of the inhabited world. God's signs (ototekha) — visible acts of power in nature and history — produce awe even at the world's edges. The 'gateways' (motsa'ey) of morning and evening personify dawn and dusk as shouting with joy (tarnin) — the daily cycle itself celebrates God.
10. The word peleg ('stream, channel, watercourse') appears with Elohim — 'the channel/stream of God' — suggesting a heavenly irrigation system. The verb tashrennah ('you enrich it') is emphatic: rabbat ('greatly, abundantly'). This is not bare sufficiency but lavish provision.
11. The agricultural detail is precise: tlameyha ('its furrows') are soaked, gedudeyha ('its ridges, its clods') are settled and broken down by rain. The verb temoggenah ('you dissolve it, you soften it') describes the rain turning hard, compacted soil into workable earth. Then God blesses the growth (tsimchah, 'its sprouting') — the entire process from plowing to germination is God's work.
12. The word ma'gal ('track, rut, path') can refer to wagon wheel ruts. The image may be of God traveling across the land in a harvest chariot, with the ruts behind him filling with oil and grain. The word deshen ('fatness') is the language of the richest sacrifice and the richest food.
13. Even the ne'ot midbar ('pastures of the wilderness') — places normally dry and sparse — participate in the abundance. The hills (geva'ot) 'gird themselves' (tachgornah) with joy (gil) as if putting on a garment. The wilderness and the hills are personified as celebrants dressed for a festival.
14. The closing verse dresses the landscape in living things: karim ('meadows, pastures') wear flocks like garments, and amaqim ('valleys') are wrapped in grain (bar) like a robe. Then comes the climactic line: yitro'a'u af yashiru ('they shout for joy, indeed they sing!'). The subject is the meadows and valleys themselves — the land has become a choir. The psalm ends not with human praise but with creation's own song.

66

Summary: *Psalm 66 is a two-movement hymn that begins with a call for the entire earth to shout joyfully to God and then narrows to a single worshiper fulfilling personal vows. The first half (verses 1-12) summons all nations to witness God's awesome deeds, recalls the crossing of the sea and the river, and describes a period of national testing where God refined his people like silver and brought them through fire and water into abundance. The second half (verses 13-20) shifts to first person singular: the psalmist enters the temple with burnt offerings, fulfills his vows, and testifies that God has heard his prayer and not withheld his faithful love.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The psalm's architecture is its most remarkable feature. It begins with the widest possible scope ('all the earth') and progressively narrows: all nations, then Israel's national story, then the community's testing, then one individual standing in the temple with offerings. The universal and the particular are not in tension but connected — the God who parted the sea for a nation is the same God who heard one person's prayer. The conditional statement in verse 18 ('If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened') is one of the most direct ethical-theological statements in the Psalms — access to God is not merely ritual but moral.*

Translation Friction: *The superscription identifies this as 'a song, a psalm' but does not attribute it to David. The shift from plural 'we/us' (verses 1-12) to singular 'I/me' (verses 13-20) has generated debate about whether this is one psalm or two originally separate compositions. The 'sea' and 'river' in verse 6 most naturally refer to the Red Sea and the Jordan, but some scholars see them as references to creation's waters. The refining imagery (verse 10) and the description of being brought through fire and water (verse 12) suggest a severe national crisis, though the specific historical occasion is not identified.*

Connections: *The crossing of the sea (verse 6) connects to Exodus 14-15 and Joshua 3-4. The refining-as-silver metaphor appears in Isaiah 48:10, Zechariah 13:9, and Malachi 3:2-3 — testing by fire as God's purification method. The testimony formula 'Come and hear, all you who fear God' (verse 16) anticipates the testimony tradition in the early church (Acts 4:20, 1 John 1:1-3). The ethical condition for answered prayer (verse 18) is echoed in Isaiah 1:15 ('When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you') and 1 John 3:21-22.*

‡For the director of music. A song. A psalm.
Shout joyfully to God, all the earth!

‡Sing the glory of his name;
make his praise glorious.

³Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds!
Because of your great power,
your enemies cringe before you."

⁴All the earth bows down to you
and sings to you;
they sing to your name. Selah.

⁵Come and see the works of God —
awesome in his deeds toward the children of humanity.

⁶He turned the sea into dry land;
through the river they crossed on foot —
there we rejoiced in him!

⁷He rules by his power forever;
his eyes keep watch on the nations.
Let the rebellious not exalt themselves. Selah.

⁸Bless our God, you peoples;
let the sound of his praise be heard.

⁹He keeps us among the living
and does not let our feet slip.

¹⁰For you have tested us, God;
you have refined us as silver is refined.

¹¹You brought us into the net;
you placed a heavy burden on our backs.

¹²You let people ride over our heads;
we went through fire and through water,
but you brought us out to a place of abundance.

¹³I will come into your house with burnt offerings;
I will fulfill my vows to you —

¹⁴the vows that my lips opened to speak,
that my mouth uttered when I was in distress.

¹⁵I will offer you burnt offerings of fattened animals
with the smoke of rams;
I will prepare cattle and goats. Selah.

¹⁶Come and hear, all you who revere God,
and I will tell you what he has done for my life.

¹⁷To him I cried out with my mouth,
and praise was on my tongue.

¹⁸If I had cherished evil in my heart,
the Lord would not have listened.

¹⁹But God has truly heard;
he has paid attention to the voice of my prayer.

²⁰Blessed be God,
who has not turned away my prayer
or his faithful love from me.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb hari'u ('shout, raise a shout') is the same word used for a battle cry or a shout of acclamation for a king. The scope is universal: kol ha-arets ('all the earth') — every nation and land is summoned to participate.
2. The command is to zamru ('sing, make music to') the kavod ('glory, honor') of God's name. The second line intensifies: simu kavod tehillato ('set/make glory his praise') — the praise itself should carry the weight of glory.
3. The verb yekachashu ('they cringe, they submit grudgingly, they feign obedience') indicates reluctant submission — God's enemies do not willingly bow but are forced into compliance by the sheer magnitude of his power (rov uzzekha, 'the greatness of your strength').
4. The verb yishtachavu ('they bow down, they prostrate themselves') describes full-body worship. The triple repetition of singing (vizammeru lakh, yezammeru shimkha) emphasizes that worship is the earth's proper response. Selah marks a pause.
5. The invitation lekhu u-re'u ('come and see') shifts from command to witness — the nations are summoned not just to worship but to observe evidence. The phrase nora alilah ('awesome in deed/action') describes God's historical interventions as the visible proof of his character.
6. The sea (yam) is the Red Sea of the Exodus; the river (nahar) is the Jordan of the conquest. The verb hafakh ('he turned, he overturned') describes radical transformation — water became walkable ground. The shift to 'we rejoiced' (nismechah) collapses the historical distance: the present community claims the ancient deliverance as their own experience.
7. God's rule (moshel) is permanent (olam, 'forever') and his eyes (eynav) maintain surveillance over the nations (goyim). The warning to the sorerim ('rebellious ones, stubborn ones') not to exalt themselves is a political warning: no nation should presume to challenge the God who parted the sea.
8. The imperative barakhu ('bless!') is addressed to ammim ('peoples, nations') — not just Israel but the watching world. The verb hashmi'u ('cause to be heard, make loud') demands that praise not remain silent but become audible, public, and unavoidable.
9. The phrase ha-sam nafshenu ba-chayyim ('the one who places our soul/life among the living') is a statement of preservation — God actively maintains their existence. The feet not slipping (lo natan la-mot raglenu) uses the language of walking a dangerous path without falling.
10. The verb tsaraph ('to refine, to smelt') is the same verb used for testing gold and silver in a crucible. The comparison ki-tseraf kasef ('as one refines silver') implies that God controls the heat and duration — the refiner watches the metal and knows when to stop.
11. The metsudah ('net, snare, stronghold') here functions as a trap — God himself led them into confinement. The mu'aqah ('pressure, burden, constraint') on the motneynu ('our loins, our backs') describes the physical weight of suffering. The theological boldness is striking: God is the agent of the testing, not merely the one who permits it.
12. The verb hirkavta ('you caused to ride') enosh ('a mortal, humanity') le-roshenu ('over our heads') depicts the humiliation of being trampled. The word revayah ('abundance, overflow, well-watered place') is the psalm's turning point — the suffering was a corridor, not a destination.
13. The psalm shifts abruptly from 'we' to 'I' — one individual steps forward from the community. The olot ('burnt offerings') are whole offerings consumed entirely on the altar, representing total dedication. The vows (nedaray) were made during the crisis and are now being paid in worship.
14. The phrase asher patsu sefatay ('which my lips opened/burst open') emphasizes the urgency of the vows — they burst out under pressure. The vow made in crisis (ba-tsar li, 'when it was narrow/tight for me') is now fulfilled in the spacious relief of deliverance.
15. The lavishness of the offerings — mechim ('fatted animals'), elim ('rams'), baqar ('cattle'), attudim ('goats') — reflects the magnitude of gratitude. The qetoret ('smoke, incense') of rams refers to the aromatic smoke rising from the burning fat. This is not a token gesture but an extravagant response to experienced deliverance.
16. The formula lekhu shim'u ('come and hear') shifts from sacrifice to testimony. The audience is kol yir'ey Elohim ('all who fear/revere God') — fellow worshipers who will understand the significance of the story. The phrase asher asah le-nafshi ('what he has done for my soul/life') introduces personal narrative as a form of worship.
17. The phrase romam tachat leshoni ('exaltation was under my tongue') is a vivid idiom: even as the psalmist cried out in distress, praise was already present beneath the surface, ready to emerge. The mouth that called for help was already preparing to give thanks.

18. The conditional *im* ('if') creates a theological principle: internal moral orientation affects the efficacy of prayer. This does not mean only perfect people can pray — Psalm 65:4 already acknowledged that transgressions overpower the individual. The point is about the direction of the heart, not the perfection of the life.
19. The word *akhen* ('truly, certainly, indeed') is emphatic — against all the reasons prayer might not work, against the conditional warning of the previous verse, God has in fact listened. The verb *hiqshiv* ('he has paid attention, he has given ear') repeats the language of attentive listening from verse 2.
20. The closing benediction pairs two things God has not removed: *tefillati* ('my prayer') and *chasdo* ('his faithful love'). The connection is deliberate — God's willingness to hear prayer and God's faithful love (*chesed*) are aspects of the same reality. The psalm that began with all the earth shouting to God ends with one person blessing God for not turning away.

67

Summary: *Psalm 67 is a compact, symmetrical hymn asking God to bless Israel so that God's way and saving power become known among all nations. Built around a repeated refrain calling on the peoples to praise God, the psalm envisions a world where every nation acknowledges God's just governance and celebrates the earth's abundance. It opens with the priestly blessing of Numbers 6 and closes with the expectation that God's blessing will cause all the ends of the earth to revere him.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This psalm is one of the clearest missionary texts in the Hebrew Bible. Israel's blessing is not an end in itself but a means — 'so that your way may be known on earth, your deliverance among all nations.' The concentric structure is precise: A (blessing, verse 2), B (nations know God, verse 3), C (refrain: peoples praise, verse 4), D (center: God judges with equity, verse 5), C' (refrain: peoples praise, verse 6), B' (earth yields, verse 7a), A' (God blesses, ends of earth revere, verses 7b-8). The architecture mirrors the theology: God's blessing radiates outward from Israel to reach the edges of the world.*

Translation Friction: *The superscription assigns this to the director of music with stringed instruments (*neqinot*) but gives no author. The opening line echoes the Aaronic blessing (Numbers 6:24-26) closely enough that the psalm may have been composed as a liturgical expansion of that priestly prayer. Whether the harvest imagery (verse 7, 'the earth has yielded its produce') indicates a specific harvest festival or is metaphorical for God's general blessing is debated. The seven-verse structure has been noted — seven being the number of completeness — giving the psalm a sense of wholeness.*

Connections: *The priestly blessing connection to Numbers 6:24-26 is foundational. The vision of all nations knowing God's way connects to Abraham's call ('in you all families of the earth shall be blessed,' Genesis 12:3) and to the prophetic hope in Isaiah 2:2-4 and Micah 4:1-3. Paul quotes the principle of God's blessing extending to the nations in Galatians 3:8. The psalm's theology stands behind the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19) — God's people are blessed in order to be a blessing.*

¹For the director of music. With stringed instruments. A psalm. A song.

²May God be gracious to us and bless us;
may he make his face shine on us. Selah.

³so that your way may be known on earth,
your deliverance among all nations.

⁴Let the peoples thank you, God;
let all the peoples thank you.

⁵Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,
for you judge the peoples with equity
and guide the nations on earth. Selah.

⁶Let the peoples thank you, God;
let all the peoples thank you.

⁷The earth has yielded its produce;
God — our God — blesses us.

⁸God blesses us,
and all the ends of the earth revere him.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The double designation *mizmor shir* ('psalm, song') with *neginot* ('stringed instruments') indicates a musically accompanied liturgical piece.
2. The verbs *yechnenu* ('may he be gracious to us'), *vivarkhenu* ('may he bless us'), and *ya'er* ('may he cause to shine') mirror the Aaronic benediction closely. *Selah* marks a musical pause after this foundational prayer.
3. The infinitive *la-da'at* ('so that it may be known') reveals the purpose of the blessing requested in verse 2. God's 'way' (*darkhekha*) and 'deliverance' (*yeshuatekha*) are to become public knowledge among *kol goyim* ('all nations'). Israel is blessed for the sake of the world's knowledge of God.
4. The refrain *yodukha ammim* ('let the peoples thank/praise you') appears here and in verse 6, framing the psalm's center. The word *ammim* ('peoples') is plural — this is not Israel alone but the family of nations. The repetition of *kullam* ('all of them') leaves no people group excluded.
5. The word *mishor* ('equity, level ground, fairness') describes judgment that is straight and even — no favoritism, no corruption, no arbitrary power. The verb *tanchem* ('you guide them') uses the same root as *nachah* ('to lead, to guide'), evoking pastoral care alongside judicial authority.
6. The refrain repeats identically from verse 4, creating the psalm's structural frame. The repetition is not redundancy but emphasis — the call for universal praise brackets the central declaration of God's just rule.
7. The phrase *erets natnah yevulah* ('the earth has given its produce') grounds the psalm's theology in material reality — God's blessing is not abstract but takes the form of food from the ground. The double identification *Elohim Elohenu* ('God, our God') is emphatic and possessive — the God who governs the nations is also our own God.
8. The psalm closes by completing the circle: God's blessing of Israel (*yevarkhenu*) results in universal reverence (*ve-yir'u oto kol afsey arets*). The 'ends of the earth' (*afsey arets*) represent the most remote populations — God's blessing of one people reaches the farthest margins of the world. The verb *yir'u* ('they revere, they fear') describes not terror but awe-filled recognition of who God is.

68

Summary: *Psalm 68 is the great theophany-and-victory psalm of the Psalter — a sweeping hymn that traces God's march from Sinai through the wilderness to Zion, scattering enemies, providing for the poor, and establishing his dwelling place among his people. The psalm begins with the ancient war cry of Numbers 10:35 ('Let God rise up, let his enemies be scattered') and proceeds through a sequence of divine actions: God is father to the fatherless, defender of widows, settler of the lonely in families, liberator of prisoners. The march through the wilderness shakes the earth and pours rain. God's mountain (Zion) is chosen over the higher peaks of Bashan. A vast procession brings God into the sanctuary. The psalm calls on kingdoms of the earth to sing to God, who rides the ancient heavens and gives power to his people.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This is among the most difficult and most magnificent psalms in the collection. Its difficulty lies in its archaic Hebrew, abrupt transitions, and compressed allusions to multiple traditions (Sinai, the wilderness march, the conquest, the temple procession). Its magnificence lies in the sheer scope of what it attempts: to narrate God's journey from desert mountain to Jerusalem temple as a single, continuous march of triumph. The God of this psalm is simultaneously a cosmic warrior, a father of orphans, a rain-giver, a conqueror, and a king enthroned in procession. The image of God 'riding on the clouds' (*rokhev ba-aravot*, verse 5) connects to ancient Near Eastern storm-god imagery while surpassing it — this God uses his storm-power to house the homeless and free prisoners. The procession scene (verses 25-28) is one of the most vivid liturgical descriptions in the Hebrew Bible.*

Translation Friction: Psalm 68 is considered one of the most textually challenging chapters in the entire Hebrew Bible. Multiple verses contain rare or unique vocabulary, and the Hebrew text may be corrupted in places. Scholarly translations differ significantly in verses 12-14, 18, 23, and 31. The psalm may be a single composition or a medley of older fragments. The reference to 'gifts among humanity' in verse 19 is famously quoted by Paul in Ephesians 4:8, where he changes 'received gifts' to 'gave gifts' — a reinterpretation that has generated extensive theological discussion. The 'mountain of Bashan' (verse 16) and the jealousy of the many-peaked mountain looking at Zion are unusual images. The procession in verses 25-28 lists specific tribes (Benjamin, Judah, Zebulun, Naphtali) but not all twelve, raising questions about the historical occasion.

Connections: The opening verse quotes Numbers 10:35, the cry when the ark set out on the march. The Sinai theophany (verse 9) echoes Judges 5:4-5 (the Song of Deborah). The ascension and gifts of verse 19 are applied to Christ's ascension in Ephesians 4:8-10. The image of God riding the clouds appears in Daniel 7:13 and is transferred to the Son of Man. The father-of-orphans and defender-of-widows titles (verse 6) define God's character in terms of justice for the vulnerable, a theme central to the prophets (Isaiah 1:17, James 1:27).

¹For the director of music. Of David. A psalm. A song.

²Let God rise up — let his enemies be scattered!
Let those who hate him flee before him!

³As smoke is blown away, so blow them away;
as wax melts before fire,
so the wicked perish before God.

⁴But the righteous are glad — they celebrate before God
and overflow with joy!

⁵Sing to God! Make music to his name!
Build a highway for the one who rides through the deserts —
Yah is his name — and celebrate before him!

⁶Father of the fatherless,
defender of widows —
God in his holy dwelling.

⁷God settles the lonely in families;
he leads prisoners out into prosperity.
But the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land.

⁸God, when you went out before your people,
when you marched through the wasteland — Selah —

⁹The earth shook; the heavens poured down rain
before God —
this Sinai itself trembled before God,
the God of Israel.

¹⁰You poured out generous rain, God;
your inheritance was exhausted,
but you restored it.

¹¹Your community settled in it;
from your goodness, God,

you provided for the poor.

¹²The Lord gives the command;
the women who proclaim the news are a vast company.

¹³Kings of armies flee — they flee!
And the woman who stays home divides the plunder.

¹⁴Though you lie among the sheepfolds,
the wings of a dove are covered with silver,
its feathers with shimmering gold.

¹⁵When the Almighty scattered kings there,
it snowed on Zalmon.

¹⁶The mountain of God — the mountain of Bashan!
The many-peaked mountain — the mountain of Bashan!

¹⁷Why do you look with envy, you many-peaked mountains,
at the mountain God has chosen for his dwelling?
Indeed, the LORD will live there forever.

¹⁸The chariots of God are tens of thousands —
thousands upon thousands.
The Lord is among them;
Sinai is in the sanctuary.

¹⁹You ascended to the heights;
you took captives captive;
you received gifts among people —
even among the rebellious —
so that Yah God might dwell there.

²⁰Blessed be the Lord!
Day after day he bears our burden —
the God of our deliverance. Selah.

²¹Our God is a God of acts of deliverance;
and to the LORD, the Lord,
belong the escapes from death.

²²God will crush the head of his enemies,
the hairy scalp of the one who walks in his guilt.

²³The Lord said, "I will bring them back from Bashan;
I will bring them back from the depths of the sea."

²⁴So that your foot may strike through blood,
the tongue of your dogs have its share from the enemies.

²⁵They see your processions, God —
the processions of my God, my King, into the sanctuary.

²⁶Singers go in front, musicians behind,
with young women playing tambourines in the middle.

²⁷"Bless God in the assemblies —
the Lord, from the fountain of Israel!"

²⁸There is Benjamin, the youngest, leading them;
the princes of Judah in their throng;
the princes of Zebulun, the princes of Naphtali.

²⁹Your God has decreed your strength.
Show your strength, God —
the strength you have displayed for us.

³⁰Because of your temple above Jerusalem,
kings bring tribute to you.

³¹Rebuke the beast of the reeds,
the herd of bulls among the calves of the peoples,
until they grovel with bars of silver.
Scatter the peoples who delight in war.

³²Envoys will come from Egypt;
Cush will stretch out its hands to God.

³³Kingdoms of the earth, sing to God!
Make music to the Lord! Selah.

³⁴Sing to the one who rides the highest, most ancient heavens!
He sends out his voice — a voice of power!

³⁵Ascribe power to God!
His majesty is over Israel,
and his strength is in the skies.

³⁶Awesome is God from his sanctuaries!
The God of Israel — he gives power and strength to the people.
Blessed be God!

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The superscription attributes this to David and gives the double designation *mizmor shir* ('psalm, song'), indicating both instrumental and vocal performance.
2. The connection to Numbers 10:35 anchors this psalm in the wilderness march tradition — the ark moving forward, God going before his people, enemies falling away on either side.
3. Two similes describe the effect of God's presence on the wicked: smoke dispersed by wind (*ashan tindof*) and wax dissolving before fire (*donag mipney esh*). Both images emphasize the insubstantiality of evil when confronted by God — what seemed solid becomes nothing.

4. Three joy verbs pile up: yismechu ('they are glad'), ya'altsu ('they exult'), and yasisu ('they rejoice with delight'). The contrast with the previous verse is sharp: the wicked melt like wax, but the righteous thrive in God's presence. The same presence destroys and delights.
5. The Ugaritic texts use a similar epithet (rkb 'rpt, 'rider of the clouds') for the storm deity Baal. The psalm appropriates this title for YHWH, asserting that the true rider of the storms is not Baal but Yah. The verb sollu literally means 'cast up, heap up' — the image is of building a raised road through the wilderness for a royal procession.
6. The word dayyan ('judge') in the context of widows means not one who judges them but one who judges on their behalf — an advocate, a champion of their cause. The pairing of orphans and widows as the paradigm of vulnerability runs throughout the Torah, Prophets, and Writings.
7. The verb moshiv ('he causes to dwell, he settles') takes yechidim ('isolated ones, lonely ones') and places them baytah ('into a house, into a home') — God's remedy for isolation is community. The word bakosharot ('into prosperity' or 'with music') is debated — it may mean the prisoners emerge singing, or that they emerge into thriving conditions. The rebellious (sorerim) are left in tsechichah ('a parched, sun-scorched place') — the barren opposite of home.
8. The narrative shifts to the wilderness march. The verb be-tset'kha ('when you went out') and be-tsa'dekha ('when you marched') describe God leading from the front. The yeshimon ('wasteland, desert') is the barren wilderness through which Israel traveled from Sinai to Canaan.
9. This verse closely parallels Judges 5:4-5, the Song of Deborah, which also describes earth shaking and heavens dripping before the LORD. The intertextual connection suggests both texts draw on a shared tradition of the Sinai theophany as the defining moment of divine power.
10. The geshem nedavot ('rain of generosity/freewill offerings') is a striking phrase — the rain is characterized as voluntary, abundant, and gift-like. The nachalatekha ('your inheritance') is Israel, God's own portion among the nations. When the people were nilah ('weary, exhausted'), God konanta ('established, restored, sustained') them.
11. The word chayyatekha ('your community, your living ones, your flock') is unusual and may refer to God's people as a flock or community. The provision for the ani ('poor, afflicted') from God's tovah ('goodness') reinforces the theme established in verses 6-7: God's power is directed toward the vulnerable.
12. The word omer ('word, utterance, command') is God's battle order. The hamevaserot ('the women who bear good news') is a feminine plural participle — women who announce victory. This reflects the ancient Near Eastern practice of women celebrating military triumph with song (cf. Miriam in Exodus 15:20-21, the women greeting David in 1 Samuel 18:6-7). The tsava rav ('great army, vast company') describes the multitude of women heralding the news.
13. The doubling yiddodun yiddodun ('they flee, they flee') emphasizes the panicked haste of defeated kings. Meanwhile, nevat bayit ('the dweller of the house,' the woman at home) distributes the shalal ('spoil, plunder'). The image is of such complete victory that even those who did not fight share in the bounty.
14. This is one of the most debated verses in the psalm. The shefatayim ('sheepfolds' or 'saddlebags' or 'ash heaps') is uncertain. The dove image may represent Israel, the plunder, or a decorative object taken as spoil. The silver and gold on the dove's wings suggest transformation — what was lowly (lying among the sheepfolds) becomes radiant. Many scholars read this as a metaphor for Israel's transformation from humiliation to splendor through God's victory.
15. The Shaddai ('Almighty') scatters kings — the divine name emphasizes overwhelming power. Zalmon is likely a mountain, possibly near Shechem (Judges 9:48). The snowfall on Zalmon may be literal (white snow covering a dark mountain) or metaphorical (the gleaming bones of the defeated or the white garments of victory). The image conveys sudden, dramatic transformation of the landscape.
16. The 'mountain of God' (har Elohim) here refers to Bashan, a region known for its high, rugged peaks (the modern Golan Heights). The word gavunnim ('many-peaked, humped') describes the imposing, multi-summit range. The repetition creates dramatic emphasis before the contrast in the next verse.
17. The contrast between Bashan's imposing peaks and Zion's modest elevation is deliberate — God consistently chooses the lesser, the smaller, the unlikely. The verb chamad ('he desired') is the same verb used in the tenth commandment ('you shall not covet'), here applied positively to God's own desire for Zion.
18. The rekhev Elohim ('chariots of God') are the heavenly host — an innumerable army. The phrase ribbotayim alfev shin'an ('twice ten-thousand, thousands of shin'an') uses a rare word (shin'an, possibly 'repetition' or 'splendor') to describe an uncountable multitude. The closing phrase Sinai ba-qodesh ('Sinai in the sanctuary') compresses two realities: the God who appeared at Sinai is now present in the temple. Sinai has moved to Zion.
19. The phrase shavita shevi ('you captured captivity') is an idiom meaning 'you took captives' — leading a train of defeated enemies behind the victor's chariot. The phrase ba-adam ('among humanity') indicates the gifts are received from or among human beings. The inclusion of sorerim ('the rebellious') extends the reach of God's dwelling even to former enemies.
20. The verb ya'amos ('he loads, he bears, he carries') can mean either 'he loads us with blessings' or 'he bears our load for us.' The ambiguity may be intentional — God both gives generously and carries what is too heavy for his people. The phrase yom yom ('day by day') makes this a daily reality, not an occasional intervention.
21. The plural moshavot ('acts of deliverance, saving deeds') emphasizes that God's rescue is not a single event but a pattern. The phrase la-mavet totsa'ot ('to/from death the exits/escapes') declares that even death's door has exits — and those exits belong to God. He controls the passage

between life and death.

22. The verb *yimchats* ('he will crush, he will shatter') targets the *rosh* ('head') of God's enemies. The 'hairy scalp' (*qodqod se'ar*) may indicate a warrior who wears his hair long as a sign of strength or consecration — even this emblem of power is shattered. The enemy is identified as one who *mithalekh ba-ashamav* ('walks about in his guilt') — someone who parades in his transgression without repentance.
23. God's promise to retrieve his people from Bashan (the distant northeast) and from the *metsulot yam* ('depths of the sea') expresses total recovery — no place is too remote or too deep for God to reach. These may also be places where enemies hide, and the promise is that God will pursue and recover justice from every hiding place.
24. The violent imagery of feet in blood and dogs lapping — standard ancient Near Eastern victory language — describes the totality of defeat. The dogs (*kelavekha*) are scavengers that consume the remains of the battlefield. This is not gratuitous but conventional war poetry expressing the completeness of God's triumph over those who oppose him.
25. The word *halikhotekha* ('your goings, your processions') shifts the psalm from battle narrative to liturgical pageant. The watchers see God's procession (*halikot*) entering the sanctuary (*ba-qodesh*). The possessive titles *Eli Malki* ('my God, my King') are deeply personal amid this public spectacle.
26. The processional order is described: *sharim* ('singers') lead, *nogrim* ('instrumentalists') follow, and in the center *alamot tofot* ('young women beating tambourines'). This mirrors the victory celebrations of Miriam (Exodus 15:20) and the women greeting David (1 Samuel 18:6). The tambourine-playing women are the heartbeat of the procession.
27. The command *barku Elohim* ('bless God') is issued *be-maqhelot* ('in the assemblies, in the congregations'). The phrase *mi-meqor Yisrael* ('from the fountain/source of Israel') may mean 'you who come from Israel's source' — those who trace their origin to the patriarchal promise.
28. Four tribes are named in the procession. Benjamin (*tsa'ir*, 'the youngest, the smallest') leads — another instance of the lesser going first. Judah's princes come with their *rigmatam* ('their throning' or 'their stoning,' a difficult word). Zebulun and Naphtali represent the northern tribes. The selection of two southern (Benjamin, Judah) and two northern (Zebulun, Naphtali) tribes may symbolize a united Israel in worship.
29. The verb *tsivvah* ('he has commanded, he has decreed') applies to *uzzekha* ('your strength') — God's power over Israel is not accidental but decreed. The prayer *uzzah Elohim* ('be strong, O God' or 'show your strength, God') asks God to continue demonstrating the power he has already shown (*zu pa'alta lanu*, 'that which you have worked for us').
30. The *heykhal* ('temple, palace') over Jerusalem becomes the reason kings (*melakhim*) bring *shay* ('tribute, gifts'). The psalm envisions foreign rulers acknowledging the God of Zion by sending offerings — the nations drawn to the temple that represents God's earthly throne.
31. This difficult verse uses animal imagery for hostile nations. The *chayyat qaneh* ('beast of the reeds') likely refers to the hippopotamus or crocodile of the Nile — a veiled reference to Egypt. The 'bulls' (*abbirim*) and 'calves' (*egley ammin*) represent powerful and lesser nations respectively. The prayer asks God to humble them until they bring silver tribute and to scatter those who love war.
32. The word *chashmannim* ('envoys, nobles, bronze vessels') is rare. Egypt (*Mitsrayim*) and Cush (the region south of Egypt, often identified with Nubia/Ethiopia) represent the farthest reaches of the known world. Cush stretching out its hands (*tarits yadav*) to God is a gesture of prayer and submission — even the most distant nations will reach toward the God of Israel.
33. The call expands to *mamlekhote ha-arets* ('kingdoms of the earth') — every political entity on the planet is summoned to sing. This is the psalm's most expansive worship command, reaching beyond individuals and peoples to organized nations.
34. The phrase *shemey shemey qedem* ('the heavens of the heavens of old') is the most exalted spatial designation possible — the highest tier of the ancient cosmos. God rides there as he rode the deserts in verse 5. His voice (*qol oz*, 'voice of power/strength') thunders from that height — the storm-voice that shakes the world.
35. The command *tenu oz l'Elohim* ('give/ascribe power to God') does not mean God lacks power but that worshipers acknowledge it. God's *ga'avato* ('his majesty, his pride, his exaltation') extends over Israel, and his *oz* ('strength') operates in the *shechayim* ('clouds, skies'). The dual location — over Israel and in the skies — holds together the particular and the cosmic.
36. The psalm closes with *nora* ('awesome, to be feared') proceeding from God's *miqdashekha* ('your sanctuaries'). The God of Israel (*El Yisrael*) is the one who gives (*noten*) *oz* ('power') and *ta'atsumot* ('mighty strength') to the people (*la-am*). The final words — *barukh Elohim* ('blessed be God') — seal the psalm with a benediction. The psalm that began with God rising against his enemies ends with God giving his strength to his people.

69

Summary: *Psalm 69 is one of the most frequently quoted psalms in the New Testament, a raw cry from the depths. The psalmist is drowning — waters have reached his neck, he sinks in deep mud, floodwaters sweep over him. He has cried until his throat is raw and his eyes fail from waiting. Those who hate him without cause outnumber the hairs on his head. He is estranged from his own brothers, consumed by zeal for God's house, and mocked by those who sit in the gate. He calls on God for rescue, asks that his enemies face devastating consequences, and closes with a vow of praise and a vision of Zion rebuilt, declaring that God hears the needy and does not despise his prisoners.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The New Testament applies this psalm to Jesus more than almost any other psalm except Psalm 22 and Psalm 110. 'Zeal for your house has consumed me' (verse 10) is quoted at the temple cleansing (John 2:17). 'They gave me vinegar to drink' (verse 22) is fulfilled at the cross (Matthew 27:48, John 19:29). 'Let their table become a snare' (verse 23) is applied by Paul to unbelieving Israel (Romans 11:9). 'Let their dwelling be desolate' (verse 26) is applied to Judas (Acts 1:20). The psalm's power lies in its refusal to sanitize suffering — the psalmist does not pretend faith makes pain disappear. He drowns, he weeps, he rages, and then he praises.*

Translation Friction: *The superscription assigns this to David 'on shoshannim' (lilies), a musical direction. The imprecatory section (verses 23-29) is among the most severe in the Psalter — curses on enemies' tables, eyes, loins, and dwelling places, with a request that they be blotted from the book of the living. These verses have generated extensive ethical discussion. The closing verses (34-37) shift to a vision of Zion's restoration that some scholars date to the exilic or post-exilic period. The psalm's length (37 verses in Hebrew) and emotional range suggest it may preserve an extended prayer that passed through multiple stages of composition.*

Connections: *The drowning imagery connects to Jonah 2 (the prayer from the fish) and to the baptismal theology of Romans 6 (going down into death and coming up again). The 'zeal for your house' quotation at the temple cleansing (John 2:17) positions Jesus as the one who fulfills the psalmist's consuming passion for God's dwelling. The vinegar on the cross (John 19:28-30) explicitly cites this psalm. Paul's use of verse 23 in Romans 11:9-10 applies the hardening language to Israel's temporary unbelief. The book of life reference (verse 29) appears in Revelation 3:5, 13:8, and 20:15.*

¹For the director of music. According to 'Lilies.' Of David.

²Save me, God,
for the waters have reached my neck!

³I have sunk into deep mud where there is no foothold;
I have come into the depths of water,
and the flood sweeps over me.

⁴I am exhausted from calling out;
my throat is raw.
My eyes fail from waiting for my God.

⁵Those who hate me without cause
outnumber the hairs on my head.
Those who would destroy me — my lying enemies — are powerful.
What I did not steal, I am forced to give back.

⁶God, you know my foolishness;
my offenses are not hidden from you.

⁷Let those who wait for you not be put to shame through me,
Lord GOD of Hosts.
Let those who seek you not be humiliated through me,
God of Israel.

⁸For it is because of you that I bear insult;
shame covers my face.

⁹I have become a stranger to my brothers,
a foreigner to my mother's sons.

¹⁰For zeal for your house has consumed me,
and the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.

¹¹I wept and fasted,
and that became a source of insult to me.

¹²I put on sackcloth as my clothing,
and I became a byword to them.

¹³Those who sit in the gate gossip about me;
I am the theme of drunkards' songs.

¹⁴But as for me — my prayer is to you, LORD,
at a time of favor.
God, in the abundance of your faithful love,
answer me with the reliability of your deliverance.

¹⁵Rescue me from the mud — do not let me sink!
Let me be delivered from those who hate me
and from the depths of water.

¹⁶Do not let the floodwater sweep me away;
do not let the deep swallow me;
do not let the pit close its mouth over me.

¹⁷Answer me, LORD, for your faithful love is good;
in the abundance of your compassion, turn to me.

¹⁸Do not hide your face from your servant,
for I am in distress — answer me quickly!

¹⁹Come near to my life and redeem it;
because of my enemies, ransom me.

²⁰You know my insult, my shame, my humiliation;
all my adversaries are before you.

²¹Insult has broken my heart, and I am sick.
I looked for sympathy, but there was none;
for comforters, but I found none.

²²They put poison in my food;
for my thirst, they gave me vinegar to drink.

²³Let their table become a snare before them,
and their peace offerings become a trap.

²⁴Let their eyes be darkened so they cannot see,
and make their backs shake continually.

²⁵Pour out your fury on them;
let the burning of your anger overtake them.

²⁶Let their encampment be desolate;
let no one live in their tents.

²⁷For they persecute the one you have struck;
they talk about the pain of those you have wounded.

²⁸Add punishment upon their punishment;
do not let them enter into your righteousness.

²⁹Let them be erased from the book of the living;
let them not be recorded with the righteous.

³⁰But I am afflicted and in pain;
your deliverance, God, will lift me to safety.

³¹I will magnify him with thanksgiving.
I will praise the name of God with a song;

³²This will please the LORD more than an ox,
more than a bull with horns and hooves.

³³The humble see it and are glad.
You who seek God — let your hearts live!

³⁴For the LORD hears the needy,
and he does not despise his prisoners.

³⁵Let heaven and earth praise him,
the seas and everything that moves in them!

³⁶For God will save Zion
and rebuild the cities of Judah;
they will settle there and possess it.

³⁷The descendants of his servants will inherit it,
and those who love his name will live there.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The notation *al shoshannim* ('according to lilies') likely indicates a melody or musical mode named after lilies. The same notation appears in Psalms 45 and 80.

2. The verb hoshi'eni is from the root y-sh-' (deliver, save) — the same root behind the names Joshua and Jesus. The waters reaching the nephesh means they have risen to the point where breathing is impossible.
3. The verb tava'ti ('I have sunk') describes being swallowed by yeven metsulah ('mud of the deep'). The phrase ein mo'amad ('there is no standing place') means the psalmist has nothing solid beneath him. The shibboleth ('flood, current, rushing stream') shetafatni ('has swept me away'). Three layers of drowning: mud, depth, and current.
4. The verb yaga'ti ('I am exhausted, I am weary') describes physical depletion from crying. The verb nichar ('it is scorched, it is raw, it is hoarse') applies to the geroni ('my throat') — the voice itself has been damaged by prolonged crying. The eyes kalu ('fail, are consumed') from extended watching (meyachel, 'hoping, waiting') for God. Every organ is affected: throat, eyes, and strength.
5. The phrase sone'ay chinnam ('those who hate me for nothing, without cause') is quoted by Jesus in John 15:25 ('They hated me without reason'). The final line (asher lo gazalti az ashiv, 'what I did not rob, then I must return') describes being forced to make restitution for crimes never committed — the injustice of false accusation.
6. The psalmist does not claim sinlessness — he acknowledges ivvalti ('my foolishness') and ashmotay ('my offenses, my guilt'). These are not hidden (lo nikhchadu) from God. Yet the psalm's argument is that the suffering he endures is disproportionate and unjust — he has real faults, but the hatred against him is chinnam ('without cause').
7. The psalmist fears that his suffering will become a stumbling block for others — that people who trust God (qovekha, 'those who wait for you') will be embarrassed (yevoshu) or humiliated (yikkallemu) because God appears not to rescue his own. This concern for the faith community elevates the prayer beyond personal interest.
8. The phrase alekha nasati cherpah ('because of you I have carried reproach') directly connects the psalmist's suffering to his allegiance to God. The shame is not for wrongdoing but for faithfulness — he is mocked precisely because of his commitment to God.
9. The terms muzar ('estranged, strange') and nokhri ('foreign, alien') describe social exclusion from the psalmist's own family. This is not political opposition but intimate betrayal — the people closest to him have treated him as an outsider.
10. The two halves of this verse explain the psalmist's isolation: internally he is consumed by devotion to God's house, and externally he absorbs the hostility that is actually directed at God. He is caught between fire from within and fire from without.
11. Even the psalmist's spiritual practices — weeping and fasting — are turned against him as objects of mockery. His religious sincerity is not respected but ridiculed.
12. Sackcloth (saq) is the garment of mourning and repentance. The psalmist's visible grief makes him a mashal ('proverb, byword, object lesson') — people use him as an example of what happens to the excessively devout.
13. The 'gate' (sha'ar) is the public square where legal and social discourse happens — the psalmist is discussed in the most public forum. The neginot shoteh shekhar ('songs of drinkers of strong drink') indicates he has become material for tavern mockery. His suffering is entertainment.
14. The phrase et ratson ('time of favor, acceptable time') indicates the psalmist trusts that God has appointed a time for response. He grounds his appeal in two divine attributes: rov chasdekha ('the abundance of your faithful love') and emet yish'ekha ('the truth/reliability of your deliverance'). Both faithful love and truth are invoked as the basis for rescue.
15. The petition returns to the drowning imagery of verses 2-3: tit ('mud, mire'), tiv'ah ('sinking'), and ma'amaqqey mayim ('depths of water'). The psalmist asks for rescue from both the physical danger and the human enemies — the two are intertwined.
16. Three drowning images in sequence: the shibboleth mayim ('flood of water') sweeping, the metsulah ('deep, abyss') swallowing, and the be'er ('pit, well') closing its mouth (piyha) over the psalmist. The pit closing its mouth is personification — the underworld as a creature that consumes.
17. The appeal is to two divine qualities: chesed (tov chasdekha, 'your faithful love is good') and rachamim (rov rachamekha, 'the abundance of your compassion'). The verb peneh ('turn') asks God to face the psalmist — the opposite of hiding the face.
18. The request al taster panekha ('do not hide your face') is the psalm's deepest fear — worse than drowning is God turning away. The urgency marker maher ('quickly, speedily') reflects the extremity of the situation. The title avdekha ('your servant') claims covenant relationship.
19. Two redemption verbs: ge'alah ('redeem it,' the kinsman-redeemer verb) and pedeni ('ransom me,' the commercial redemption verb). The psalmist asks God to act as both family redeemer and ransom-payer. The motivation 'because of my enemies' asks God to act for his own honor — if the psalmist perishes, the enemies triumph.
20. Three shame words accumulate: cherpah ('insult, reproach'), boshet ('shame'), and kelimmah ('humiliation, disgrace'). The declaration negdekha kol tsoreray ('all my adversaries are before you') means God sees every one of them — none is hidden.
21. The verb shavrah ('it has broken') applied to the lev ('heart') describes a heart that has been fractured by sustained verbal assault. The verb va-anusah ('and I am sick, and I am incurable') adds physical illness to emotional devastation. The search for nud ('sympathy, someone to show grief') and menachamim ('comforters') yields nothing — the isolation is total.
22. The word rosh can refer to any bitter, poisonous plant. The chomets ('vinegar') is sour wine — not refreshing but mocking. Together they represent the complete inversion of hospitality: what should nourish, harms.

23. The imprecatory section begins. The shulchan ('table') that should provide sustenance becomes a pach ('snare'). Their shelomim ('peace offerings' or 'welfare, prosperity') becomes a moqesh ('trap'). Paul quotes this verse in Romans 11:9-10, applying it to Israel's hardening.
24. The darkening of eyes (techshakhnah eyneyhem) removes the capacity to see and understand. The shaking of loins (motneyhem tamid ham'ad) describes loss of physical strength and stability. Paul quotes this verse in Romans 11:10.
25. The verb shefokh ('pour out') applies za'am ('fury, indignation') — the same pouring imagery used for the flood waters, now directed at the enemies. The verb yasigem ('let it overtake them') describes pursuit and capture — God's anger chasing down those who oppressed the psalmist.
26. The tirah ('encampment, fortress, dwelling') becomes neshamah ('desolate, devastated'). Peter quotes this verse in Acts 1:20, applying it to Judas Iscariot after his betrayal of Jesus — 'Let his dwelling place be desolate, and let no one live in it.'
27. The theological complexity is stark: the enemies persecute someone God has already struck (hikkita). Rather than showing compassion to the divinely afflicted, they add persecution to suffering. They 'talk about the pain' (yesapperu el makh'ov) of God's wounded ones — discussing their agony as gossip or accusation rather than with sympathy.
28. The phrase tenah avon al avonam ('give iniquity upon their iniquity') could mean 'add guilt to their guilt' (let their sins compound) or 'add punishment upon their punishment.' The phrase al yavo'u be-tsidqatekha ('let them not enter into your righteousness') asks that the enemies be excluded from the saving dimension of God's justice.
29. The sefer chayyim ('book of the living, book of life') is a divine register of those who belong to God's community. Being erased (yimmachu) from it means removal from divine protection and ultimately from life itself. This image appears in Exodus 32:32-33 (Moses' plea), Daniel 12:1, and throughout Revelation (3:5, 13:8, 20:15).
30. The contrast with the imprecatory section is sharp: the psalmist identifies himself as ani ('poor, afflicted') and ko'ev ('in pain'). His hope is not in vengeance but in God's yeshuah ('deliverance'), which will tesagveni ('set me on high, lift me to a secure height') — the same elevated refuge language that appears throughout the Psalms.
31. The shift from lament to praise begins. The verbs ahallela ('I will praise') and agaddlennu ('I will magnify him, make him great') are followed by the instruments of praise: shir ('song') and todah ('thanksgiving, thank-offering'). The mouth that cried out in pain now sings.
32. The psalmist declares that vocal praise (song and thanksgiving) is more pleasing (titav) to God than the most impressive animal sacrifice — a shor par ('ox, bull') with full horns (magrin) and hooves (mafris). This anticipates the prophetic tradition that prioritizes the posture of the heart over ritual (1 Samuel 15:22, Hosea 6:6, Micah 6:6-8).
33. The anavim ('humble, lowly, afflicted') see the psalmist's deliverance and are glad (yismachu). The exhortation vihi levavkhem ('let your hearts live') addresses fellow seekers of God — the psalmist's rescue becomes a source of life for the entire community of the afflicted.
34. The theological summary: YHWH shomea el evyonim ('the LORD hears the needy') and lo vazah asirav ('he does not despise his prisoners'). The word vazah ('despise, treat with contempt') is the opposite of what God does — he treats the imprisoned and impoverished with dignity and attention.
35. The scope of praise expands to include the entire created order: shamayim ('heaven'), erets ('earth'), yammim ('seas'), and kol romes bam ('everything that moves in them'). The psalmist's personal experience of deliverance calls for a cosmic response.
36. The psalm expands from personal to national hope: God will yoshi'a ('save, deliver') Zion and yivneh ('build, rebuild') the cities of Judah. The people will yashvu ('settle, dwell') and yireshuha ('possess it, inherit it'). Some scholars see this as evidence of an exilic or post-exilic date for these closing verses.
37. The psalm closes with a vision of generational continuity: the zera ('seed, descendants') of God's avadav ('servants') will inherit the land, and those who love God's name (ohavey shemo) will dwell in it. The psalm that began in drowning ends in settlement. The movement from death to life, from flood to home, is complete.

70

Summary: Psalm 70 is a compact, urgent prayer for rescue. Nearly identical to Psalm 40:14-18, it stands as an independent plea for God to hurry. The psalmist asks God to deliver him and come quickly to his help. He prays that those who seek his life will be put to shame and driven back in humiliation, while those who seek God will rejoice and say 'God is great!' The psalm closes with the psalmist identifying himself as poor and needy, calling God his help and deliverer, and begging God not to delay.

What Makes This Remarkable: The brevity of this psalm is itself remarkable. At only six verses (five in Hebrew), it is one of the shortest psalms in the collection and functions almost as a distress signal — concentrated, repeatable, and memorizable. The repetition of 'hurry' (chushah) frames the psalm as a plea against delay. There is no extended complaint, no detailed description of enemies, no theological

argument — just the raw request for speed. The psalm's near-duplicate relationship with Psalm 40:14-18 raises questions about how psalms circulated and were adapted for different liturgical purposes. As an independent unit, it reads as a prayer that could be used in any moment of sudden crisis.

Translation Friction: *The superscription identifies this as 'of David, to bring to remembrance' (lehazkir). The same notation appears on Psalm 38. The phrase may indicate a memorial offering context or simply a prayer for God to 'remember' the supplicant. The relationship to Psalm 40:14-18 is debated: did Psalm 70 extract these verses, or did Psalm 40 incorporate an originally independent prayer? Minor textual differences exist between the two versions (Psalm 70 uses Elohim where Psalm 40 uses YHWH in some instances). The brevity means that every word carries significant weight, making even small textual variants theologically relevant.*

Connections: *The near-duplicate in Psalm 40:14-18 provides the primary literary connection. The plea for divine haste connects to the wider Psalter theme of waiting versus urgency — Psalm 62 emphasizes silent waiting, while Psalm 70 emphasizes speed. The phrase 'poor and needy' (ani ve-evyon) appears across the Psalms (9:18, 35:10, 37:14, 40:18, 72:13, 86:1, 109:22) as a self-identification by the righteous sufferer. The petition for enemies to be 'turned back' and 'put to shame' echoes Psalm 35:4 and 35:26.*

1For the director of music. Of David. For remembrance.

2God, come to rescue me!

LORD, hurry to help me!

3Let those who seek my life be put to shame and humiliated;

let those who desire my ruin
be driven back and disgraced.

4Let those who say "Aha! Aha!"

be turned back because of their shame.

5Let all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you;

let those who love your deliverance say always,
"God is great!"

6But I — I am poor and needy.

God, hurry to me!

You are my help and my deliverer;

LORD, do not delay!

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The notation lehazkir ('for remembrance, to bring to remembrance') may indicate a liturgical function connected to the memorial offering (azkarah, Leviticus 2:2) or may simply designate this as a prayer requesting God's attention and memory.
2. The verb chushah is an imperative demanding speed. This is the same verb used in Psalm 22:20, 38:23, and 71:12 — the standard emergency word for calling God to act without delay.
3. Four verbs of shame and defeat accumulate: yevoshu ('let them be ashamed'), yachperu ('let them be humiliated, let them blush'), yissogu achor ('let them be turned backward, driven back'), and yikkallemu ('let them be disgraced'). The enemies are identified by their intent: mevaqshey nafshi ('seekers of my life') and chafetsey ra'ati ('those who desire my harm'). The prayer does not ask for their death but for their defeat and public embarrassment.
4. The exclamation he'ach he'ach ('Aha! Aha!') is a taunt — the gloating of those who take pleasure in the psalmist's suffering. The prayer asks that their gloating be reversed: they will retreat (yashuvu, 'let them turn back') on account of their own boshtam ('shame'). The mockers will be mocked.
5. The two joy verbs yasisu ('let them be joyful') and yismechu ('let them be glad') match the two shame verbs of verse 3, creating structural balance. The phrase ohavey yeshuatekha ('those who love your deliverance') identifies the faithful as people who love not just God but specifically God's saving action.

6. The word *mefalti* ('my deliverer') comes from the root p-l-t ('to escape, to deliver') and suggests God as the one who provides a way out. The final verb *te'achar* ('delay, tarry, be late') treats God's intervention as time-sensitive — the psalmist's situation cannot wait.

71

Summary: *An elderly psalmist pleads for God's continued protection and deliverance in old age. Enemies are circling, interpreting his frailty as evidence that God has abandoned him. The psalm is a sustained cry of trust from someone who has known God since birth and now refuses to believe the final chapter will be one of abandonment. It draws heavily on Psalm 31 and Psalm 22, weaving earlier language into a new plea shaped by the particular vulnerability of aging.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This is one of the few psalms that explicitly addresses the experience of growing old. The psalmist does not pretend that age has not diminished him — he acknowledges that his strength is failing and his enemies see opportunity. But the theological argument is powerful: the God who sustained him from the womb (verse 6), who taught him from youth (verse 17), cannot logically abandon him now. The psalm turns aging itself into a theological argument. If God's faithfulness is real, it must extend to the end. The repeated phrase 'do not cast me off' (*al-tashlikeni*) carries the raw urgency of someone who has watched contemporaries die alone and fears the same fate.*

Translation Friction: *Psalm 71 has no superscription in the Hebrew text, which is unusual in Book II of the Psalter. The LXX attributes it to David and adds a note about the sons of Jonadab and the first captives. Its heavy borrowing from Psalm 31 and Psalm 22 has led some scholars to view it as a mosaic psalm — a composition assembled from existing psalmic language. This does not diminish its theological force; it may amplify it, as the psalmist deliberately reaches for the tradition's deepest language of trust in his hour of need.*

Connections: *Verses 1-3 closely parallel Psalm 31:2-4 (in Hebrew versification). The phrase 'from my mother's womb' (*mi-beten immi*) in verse 6 echoes Psalm 22:10-11, connecting this psalm to the larger tradition of lifelong divine care. The commitment to declare God's righteousness 'all day long' (*kol hayyom*) in verse 24 connects to the Psalter's broader theology of perpetual praise. The psalm's placement after Psalm 70 (a brief cry for help) creates a natural expansion — the short plea becomes a sustained meditation.*

¹In You, O LORD, I have taken refuge —
let me never be put to shame.

²In Your righteousness deliver me and rescue me;
turn Your ear toward me and save me.

³Be for me a rock of refuge,
a stronghold to enter continually.
You have commanded my deliverance,
for You are my rock and my fortress.

⁴My God, rescue me from the hand of the wicked,
from the grasp of the unjust and ruthless.

⁵For You are my hope, Lord GOD,
my trust since my youth.

⁶On You I have leaned from the womb;
from my mother's body You drew me out.
My praise is continually of You.

⁷I have become a sign to many,
but You are my strong refuge.

⁸Let my mouth be filled with Your praise,
all day long with Your splendor.

⁹Do not cast me off in the time of old age;
when my strength is spent, do not abandon me.

¹⁰For my enemies speak against me,
and those who watch for my life conspire together,

¹¹saying, 'God has abandoned him.
Pursue and seize him,
for there is no one to rescue him.'

¹²O God, do not be far from me;
my God, hurry to help me!

¹³Let those who accuse my life be shamed and consumed;
let those who seek my ruin
be wrapped in disgrace and humiliation.

¹⁴But I — I will hope continually,
and I will add still more to all Your praise.

¹⁵My mouth will declare Your righteousness,
all day long Your salvation,
for I cannot count them.

¹⁶I will come with the mighty deeds of the Lord GOD;
I will declare Your righteousness — Yours alone.

¹⁷O God, You have taught me from my youth,
and until now I have declared Your wonders.

¹⁸And even to old age and gray hair,
O God, do not abandon me,
until I declare Your arm to a generation,
Your power to all who are yet to come.

¹⁹Your righteousness, O God, reaches to the heights;
You who have done great things —
O God, who is like You?

²⁰You who have made us see many and bitter troubles
will revive us again,
and from the depths of the earth
You will bring us up again.

²¹You will increase my honor
and turn to comfort me.

²²I also will praise You with the harp
for Your faithfulness, my God.
I will make music to You with the lyre,
O Holy One of Israel.

²³My lips will shout for joy when I make music to You —
my very life, which You have redeemed.

²⁴My tongue also, all day long,
will murmur of Your righteousness,
for those who sought my ruin
have been shamed and disgraced.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The near-verbatim overlap with Psalm 31:2 is intentional. The psalmist is quoting established liturgical language — reaching for words that have already been tested and proven in Israel's worship.
2. The verb *palat* ('to rescue, to cause to escape') implies being pulled out of a tight, dangerous space — the image is of extraction from a trap or a collapsing structure.
3. Psalm 31:3 reads *tsur maoz* ('rock of strength') while this verse has *tsur maon* ('rock of refuge/habitation'). The one-letter difference (*zayin* vs. *nun*) may reflect textual variation, but the Masoretic text preserves *maon*, emphasizing dwelling rather than mere strength.
4. The word *chomets* ('ruthless, oppressive') literally means 'one who is sour, leavened' — the image is of someone whose character has fermented into cruelty. The three terms — *rasha* ('wicked'), *me-avvel* ('unjust'), and *chomets* ('ruthless') — paint a portrait of the psalmist's enemies as morally corrupt at every level.
5. The pairing of *Adonai YHVH* ('Lord GOD') is relatively rare in the Psalms and signals particular solemnity. The psalmist addresses God by His covenant name combined with the title of sovereignty.
6. The verb *gazah* is rare and debated. Some read it as 'my portion' (from a different root), but the context of birth imagery (*beten*, *me'ei immi*) strongly supports the meaning 'the one who cut me free' — referring to the severing of the umbilical cord at birth. This reading appears in the LXX (*skepastes mou*, 'my protector') by interpretive paraphrase.
7. The word *mofet* appears in Exodus for the plagues (signs and wonders) and in Deuteronomy 28:46 for the curses that will become 'a sign and a wonder.' The psalmist's situation has become publicly visible and is being interpreted by observers — the question is whether they are reading it correctly.
8. The parallelism pairs *tehillateka* ('Your praise') with *tif'arteka* ('Your splendor, glory, beauty'). Praise here is not merely thanksgiving but declaration of God's magnificent character. The phrase *kol hayyom* ('all day long') echoes verse 24 and creates a frame of perpetual worship.
9. This verse has no parallel in Psalm 31, confirming that Psalm 71 is not merely a copy but an original composition shaped by the experience of aging. The plea against abandonment in old age is theologically distinctive in the Psalter.
10. The phrase *shomrei nafshi* ('those who watch for my life') describes predators watching for the moment of vulnerability. They are not merely hostile; they are strategic, waiting for the right moment to strike — and old age provides it.
11. The enemies' statement mirrors the taunt against the sufferer in Psalm 22:9 and Psalm 3:3 — the recurring claim that God has withdrawn. The psalmist must contend not only with his enemies but with their theology.
12. The verb *chushah* ('hurry, hasten') conveys desperation — the situation is urgent and delay could be fatal. This verse echoes Psalm 22:12 and 22:20, reinforcing the literary connections between these psalms.
13. The verb *ya'atu* ('let them be wrapped, clothed') uses clothing imagery for shame — disgrace becomes a garment that covers them completely. The psalmist asks that the enemies' own weapon (public shame) be turned back upon them.
14. The verb *yachal* ('to hope, to wait') in the Psalms always implies patient endurance under pressure — not passive optimism but active, stubborn trust maintained against contrary evidence.

15. The word seforot ('numbers, reckonings') is rare and may also carry the sense of 'literary compositions' — the psalmist may be saying not only that he cannot count God's acts but that he lacks the literary skill to do them justice.
16. The phrase gevurot Adonai YHVH ('mighty deeds of the Lord GOD') refers to God's powerful acts in history — not abstract power but demonstrated intervention. The emphasis levaddeka ('Yours alone') is exclusive: the psalmist credits no one else, no other god, no human agency.
17. The word nifl'ot ('wonders') refers to God's extraordinary, incomprehensible acts — the same word used for the Exodus miracles. The psalmist's personal experience of God is framed in the same language as Israel's national experience.
18. The argument that God should preserve the psalmist for the sake of future testimony is a recurring motif in the Psalms (cf. Psalm 6:6, 30:10, 88:11-13). The dead cannot praise God — therefore God has a vested interest in keeping His worshipers alive.
19. The phrase mi kamokha is a declaration of incomparability that runs through Israel's worship from the Exodus to the Psalter. It is not philosophical monotheism but experiential — no other power has done what this God has done.
20. The Qere/Ketiv variation between singular and plural pronouns in this verse reflects textual uncertainty about whether the psalm is purely individual or has been adapted for communal use. The Masoretic Qere reads plural ('us'), suggesting liturgical adaptation.
21. The word gedullatai ('my greatness, my honor, my dignity') is significant for an elderly person whose enemies have declared him abandoned. God will not merely rescue him — God will restore his standing. The verb tissov ('You will turn around') suggests God turning back toward the psalmist with comfort after a season of apparent distance.
22. The nevel was a larger stringed instrument, possibly a type of angular harp, while the kinnor was the smaller lyre associated with David (1 Samuel 16:23). Together they represent full musical worship — the psalmist's response to deliverance will be public and artistic.
23. The verb padita ('You have redeemed') uses the language of payment and liberation — padah means to buy back, to ransom, to liberate by paying a price. The psalmist's life has been purchased back from the grip of death and enemies.
24. The pairing of boshu ('they are ashamed') and chafru ('they are disgraced') is a standard Hebrew word pair for total public humiliation. The psalmist who feared being put to shame (verse 1) now sees that shame transferred to his enemies — the reversal is complete.

72

Summary: *A royal psalm attributed to Solomon (or written for Solomon by David) that envisions the ideal king whose reign embodies perfect justice, compassion for the poor, universal dominion, and abundance that mirrors Eden. The psalm closes Book II of the Psalter with a doxology (verses 18-19) and a colophon noting the end of the prayers of David son of Jesse. It is the most expansive portrait of the messianic king in the Psalter.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 72 describes a king whose justice produces cosmic fertility — when the king judges rightly, the mountains bear peace and the hills produce righteousness (verse 3). This is not metaphor for the ancient Israelite mind; it is theology. The king's justice and the land's fruitfulness are connected through the covenant. The psalm reaches its most astonishing scope in verses 8-11, where the king's dominion extends from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth, and all kings bow before him. No historical Israelite king achieved this, which is precisely why the psalm became messianic — it describes what should be, and Israel kept praying it forward. The tender attention to the poor and crushed (verses 12-14) places compassion at the center of royal power: the king's greatness is measured not by conquest but by whom he defends.*

Translation Friction: *The superscription li-Shlomoh can mean 'of Solomon,' 'for Solomon,' or 'concerning Solomon.' If David composed it for his son, verse 20 ('The prayers of David son of Jesse are ended') makes sense as a colophon. If Solomon wrote it about himself, the colophon was added by a later editor collecting Book II. The universal scope (verses 8-11) far exceeds Solomon's actual kingdom, leading many scholars to read this as idealized royal theology rather than historical description. In Jewish tradition, the psalm is messianic; in Christian tradition, it is applied to Christ.*

Connections: *The language of verse 8 ('from sea to sea, from the River to the ends of the earth') reappears in Zechariah 9:10 in an explicitly messianic context. The concern for the poor echoes the covenant code (Exodus 22:21-27) and anticipates the prophetic critique of kings who failed this mandate (Jeremiah 22:13-17). The psalm's placement at the end of Book II creates a structural parallel with the doxologies that close Books I (Psalm 41:14), III (Psalm 89:53), IV (Psalm 106:48), and V (Psalm 150). The 'gold of Sheba' (verse 15) connects to the Solomon narrative in 1 Kings 10.*

¹Of Solomon.

O God, give Your judgments to the king,
and Your righteousness to the king's son.

²May he judge Your people with righteousness
and Your afflicted ones with justice.

³May the mountains bear peace for the people,
and the hills, through righteousness.

⁴May he vindicate the afflicted of the people,
save the children of the needy,
and crush the oppressor.

⁵May they fear You as long as the sun endures,
and before the moon, through all generations.

⁶May he come down like rain on mown grass,
like showers that drench the earth.

⁷In his days may the righteous flourish
and peace abound until the moon is no more.

⁸May he rule from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

⁹Before him the desert dwellers will kneel,
and his enemies will lick the dust.

¹⁰The kings of Tarshish and the coastlands will bring tribute;
the kings of Sheba and Seba will present gifts.

¹¹Let all kings bow down before him;
let all nations serve him.

¹²For he will deliver the needy who cries out,
the afflicted who has no helper.

¹³He will have pity on the poor and needy,
and the lives of the needy he will save.

¹⁴From oppression and violence he will redeem their lives,
and their blood will be precious in his eyes.

¹⁵May he live! May gold from Sheba be given to him.
May prayer be offered for him continually;
may he be blessed all day long.

¹⁶May there be abundance of grain in the land,
on the tops of the mountains may it wave like Lebanon;
and may people blossom from the city

like grass of the earth.

¹⁷May his name endure forever;
may his name flourish as long as the sun.
May all nations find blessing in him;
may they call him happy.

¹⁸Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel,
who alone does wonders.

¹⁹And blessed be His glorious name forever;
may the whole earth be filled with His glory.
Amen and Amen.

²⁰Here conclude the prayers of David, Jesse's son.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The superscription li-Shlomoh is ambiguous: the preposition le- can mean 'of,' 'for,' 'to,' or 'concerning.' If this is a prayer by David for Solomon (as the colophon in verse 20 suggests), it is a father's intercession for his son's reign.
2. The word ani ('afflicted, poor, humble') describes those who are economically and socially powerless. In the Psalms, the aniyyim are consistently portrayed as God's particular concern — the ones He hears, defends, and vindicates.
3. The verb yis'u ('may they bear, carry, lift up') is the same verb used for carrying a burden or bearing fruit. The mountains are portrayed as productive — their yield is peace. This imagery will reappear in Isaiah 55:12 where the mountains 'break forth into singing.'
4. The verb yishpot here means not merely 'judge' but 'vindicate' — to render a verdict in favor of someone who has been wronged. The ideal king does not merely hear cases; he actively rescues (yoshia) the vulnerable and actively destroys (vidakke) those who exploit them. Justice is not passive.
5. The subject shifts from the king to the people: 'may they fear You' — the king's just rule produces reverence for God. The temporal markers — 'as long as the sun,' 'before the moon,' 'through all generations' (dor dorim) — express permanence. The prayer is for an everlasting dynasty, a hope that no historical dynasty fulfilled.
6. This is one of the most beautiful images in the Psalter. The comparison of a just king to rain reverses the usual biblical metaphor of storm-God as warrior; here, God's representative is gentle, nourishing, and life-giving. The same image appears in 2 Samuel 23:4 in David's last words.
7. The verb yifrach ('may he flourish, sprout, blossom') continues the agricultural imagery — the righteous bloom like plants under the king's just rule. The phrase ad beli yare'ach ('until there is no moon') means 'forever' — as long as the created order endures.
8. Zechariah 9:10 quotes this verse nearly verbatim in an explicitly messianic prophecy about a coming king who rides on a donkey. The psalm's language became the vocabulary of messianic hope in later Jewish and Christian tradition.
9. The tsiyyim ('desert dwellers, inhabitants of arid places') represent the most remote and untamed peoples — even they submit. The phrase afar yelachekhu ('they will lick the dust') is an ancient Near Eastern image of complete submission: prostrating so low that one's face touches the ground. It appears in Micah 7:17 and Isaiah 49:23.
10. The arrival of the queen of Sheba with gifts in 1 Kings 10 is the historical echo of this poetic vision. The psalm imagines what happened once under Solomon happening perpetually under the ideal king.
11. The universality is absolute: kol melakhim ('all kings') and kol goyim ('all nations'). The verb yishtachavu ('they will bow down, prostrate themselves') is the standard word for worship in the Hebrew Bible — the line between political submission and religious worship is intentionally blurred. In bowing to this king, the nations are acknowledging the God who appointed him.
12. This verse provides the theological justification for the universal dominion described in verses 8-11. The king deserves to rule the world because he rescues the helpless. In prophetic literature, Israel's actual kings are condemned precisely for failing this standard (see Ezekiel 34, Jeremiah 22).
13. The verb yachos ('he will have pity, spare, show compassion') describes an emotional response — the king does not merely adjudicate cases involving the poor; he feels for them. The repeated emphasis on evyonim ('needy ones') in this verse drives the point home through repetition.
14. The word tokh is often emended to 'oppression' or 'exploitation' (from a root meaning 'to oppress'), though some read it as 'deceit.' Paired with chamas ('violence'), it describes the two primary ways the powerful exploit the weak: through fraud and through force.
15. The subject shifts rapidly: 'may he live' refers to the king, 'may gold be given to him' describes tribute, and 'may prayer be offered for him' shows the people praying for their king. The gold of Sheba connects to the Solomon narrative (1 Kings 10:2, 10). The phrase tamid kol hayyom ('continually, all day long') intensifies the blessing — the king is to be upheld by ceaseless intercession.

16. The word *pissat* is difficult. It may mean 'handful,' 'abundance,' or 'a cake/wafer' of grain. The context of overwhelming fertility supports 'abundance.' The image of grain on mountaintops is deliberately impossible under normal conditions — it signals the eschatological, Eden-like character of this king's reign.
17. The LXX and Targum both read *yinnon* as a messianic title. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 98b) lists *Yinnon* as one of the names of the Messiah. The echo of the Abrahamic blessing ('all nations will be blessed in him') transforms the royal psalm into a covenant psalm — the king is the fulfillment of what God promised to Abraham.
18. This doxology closes Book II (Psalms 42-72) just as Psalm 41:14 closes Book I. Each of the Psalter's five books ends with a doxology, and the final book (Book V) ends with five consecutive psalms of praise (146-150) as a grand doxology for the entire collection.
19. The double Amen ('Amen and Amen') is the standard closing formula for the doxologies that end each book of the Psalter. Amen means 'truly, so be it, let it be established' — it is the congregation's affirmation of the prayer.
20. The word *kallu* ('are finished, are ended, are completed') from *kalah* has a sense of finality and completion. This colophon is one of the clearest editorial fingerprints in the Psalter, revealing the hand of the collectors who shaped the book into its current five-part structure.

73

Summary: *Asaph's crisis of faith. The psalmist confesses that he nearly lost his footing when he saw the prosperity of the wicked. Their lives appear effortless, free of suffering, draped in arrogance — and they mock God with impunity. The psalmist's own faithfulness seems pointless until he enters the sanctuary and perceives the wicked's final destiny. The psalm pivots from envy to trust, culminating in one of the most intimate declarations of faith in the Hebrew Bible: 'Whom have I in heaven but You?'*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 73 is the Hebrew Bible's most honest exploration of theodicy at the personal level. Unlike Job, who suffers catastrophically, the psalmist here suffers the quieter torment of watching the wicked thrive while he remains faithful for apparently no return. His near-apostasy is described with startling physical imagery — 'my feet had almost slipped, my steps had nearly given way' (verse 2). What saves him is not an intellectual answer but an encounter in the sanctuary (verse 17) where he perceives — the verb is not 'understands' but 'perceives,' an act of spiritual seeing rather than rational calculation. The resolution in verses 23-28 is not that suffering is explained but that God's presence is sufficient. The psalm moves from 'Why do the wicked prosper?' to 'You are enough.'*

Translation Friction: *The phrase *akh tov le-Yisrael Elohim* ('Surely God is good to Israel') in verse 1 has a textual crux. The Masoretic text reads *le-Yisrael* ('to Israel'), but the parallel with *levvar levav* ('the pure in heart') has led many to read *la-yashar* ('to the upright') — a one-letter emendation. We retain the Masoretic reading, since the tension between communal confession ('God is good to Israel') and personal crisis ('but as for me, my feet almost slipped') is precisely the psalm's point.*

Connections: *Psalm 73 opens Book III of the Psalter (Psalms 73-89), a collection dominated by Asaph psalms and national laments. Its placement at the head of Book III is deliberate: after the royal optimism of Psalm 72 (closing Book II), Psalm 73 begins with doubt. The psalm is often compared to Job and Ecclesiastes as wisdom literature wrestling with the same question: does righteousness pay? The answer here is distinctive — not that it pays in material terms, but that the relationship itself is the reward. Verse 25 ('Whom have I in heaven but You?') anticipates Habakkuk 3:17-18, where the prophet rejoices in God even when the fig tree does not blossom.*

¹A psalm of Asaph.

Surely God is good to Israel,
to those pure in heart.

²But as for me — my feet had almost stumbled;
my steps had nearly slipped away.

³For I envied the arrogant
when I saw the well-being of the wicked.

⁴For they have no pain in their death;
their bodies are sleek and well-fed.

⁵They are not burdened like other mortals;
they are not afflicted like other people.

⁶Therefore pride is their necklace;
violence wraps them like a garment.

⁷Their eyes bulge out from fatness;
the fantasies of their hearts overflow.

⁸They mock and speak with malice;
they speak of oppression from on high.

⁹They set their mouths against the heavens,
and their tongues strut through the earth.

¹⁰Therefore the people turn to them,
and waters of abundance are drained by them.

¹¹And they say, 'How can God know?
Is there knowledge in the Most High?'

¹²Look — these are the wicked,
always at ease, piling up wealth.

¹³Surely I have kept my heart pure for nothing
and washed my hands in innocence in vain.

¹⁴I have been stricken all day long
and punished every morning.

¹⁵If I had said, 'I will speak this way' —
I would have betrayed the generation of Your children.

¹⁶When I tried to understand this,
it was troubling in my eyes —

¹⁷until I entered the sanctuary of God;
then I perceived their end.

¹⁸Surely You set them on slippery ground;
You cast them down to ruin.

¹⁹How suddenly they become a horror!
They are swept away, utterly destroyed by terrors.

²⁰Like a dream when one awakens —
O Lord, when You rouse Yourself,
You will despise their image.

²¹When my heart was embittered
and I was pierced in my innermost being,

²²I was senseless and did not understand;
I was like a brute beast before You.

²³Yet I am always with You;
You hold my right hand.

²⁴With Your counsel You guide me,
and afterward You will take me into glory.

²⁵Whom have I in heaven but You?
And besides You I desire nothing on earth.

²⁶My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the rock of my heart
and my portion forever.

²⁷For those far from You will perish;
You destroy all who are unfaithful to You.

²⁸But as for me — nearness to God is my good.
I have made the Lord GOD my refuge,
so that I may tell of all Your works.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The Masoretic text reads le-Yisrael ('to Israel'). Many scholars emend to la-yashar ('to the upright') based on the parallel with levvar levav ('pure of heart'). Both readings are theologically coherent: the MT emphasizes God's goodness to the covenant people, while the emendation emphasizes God's goodness to the morally upright.
2. The verb shuppekhu ('were poured out') is striking — it describes liquid being spilled, steps dissolving like water. The near-apostasy is depicted not as rebellion but as erosion: the ground beneath the psalmist's convictions was washing away.
3. The word hollelim ('arrogant, boastful') comes from halal in its negative sense — 'to be foolish, to boast.' These are not merely wicked people but people who flaunt their wickedness. Their arrogance is part of what makes them unbearable to the psalmist.
3. Register departure: shalom rendered as 'well-being' rather than default 'peace' because the psalmist observes the prosperity/comfort of the wicked — their material and physical wholeness, not peace in the relational or political sense.
4. The word chartsubot ('bonds, pangs, fetters') is debated. Some read it as 'pangs' (they suffer no pain), others as 'bonds' (nothing binds or constrains them). The following phrase uvari ulam ('and fat/healthy is their body') supports the reading that these are people whose physical condition betrays no suffering. They are visibly prosperous — their ease is written on their bodies.
5. The parallel between enosh ('mortal man' — emphasizing frailty) and adam ('humankind') creates a comprehensive statement: the wicked are exempt from the suffering that defines human existence. This is what makes them so maddening to the psalmist.
6. The word chamas ('violence, wrongdoing') is the same word used in Genesis 6:11 to describe the pre-flood world that provoked God's destruction. Its use here foreshadows the eventual judgment described later in the psalm.
7. The image is grotesque: eyes protruding from fat faces — physical excess mirroring moral excess. The phrase avru maskiyyot levav ('the imaginations of the heart overflow, pass beyond') suggests that their desires know no limit — they have everything and still want more. The word maskiyyot can mean 'images, pictures, imaginings' — their hearts generate endless schemes.

8. The verb *yamiku* is difficult — it may mean 'they mock, they scoff' or 'they dissolve, they melt' (i.e., they make others dissolve with fear). The phrase *mi-marom yedabberu* ('they speak from on high') captures their arrogance: they speak as if from a throne, as if they are above everyone, as if their position exempts them from accountability.
9. The phrase *shattu vashamayim pihem* ('they set their mouths in the heavens') is an image of cosmic arrogance — mouths positioned against the sky itself, speaking as rivals to God. This is not mere rudeness but theological rebellion.
10. This difficult verse seems to describe the wicked's followers — ordinary people who observe their prosperity and are drawn to them. The 'waters of abundance' (*mei male*) likely means the wicked drink deeply of success, draining the cup of prosperity dry. The verse captures the social effect of visible wickedness: it attracts a following.
11. The title *Elyon* ('Most High') emphasizes God's supreme position — and the irony is sharp: the very God whose exalted position should guarantee oversight is the one whose knowledge they deny. The higher God is, the less He sees — that is their theology.
12. The phrase *shalvei olam* can mean 'perpetually at ease' or 'at ease in the world.' Either reading conveys the same frustration: the wicked enjoy uninterrupted, seemingly permanent tranquility.
13. The phrase 'washed my hands in innocence' echoes Psalm 26:6 and the ritual handwashing of innocence (cf. Deuteronomy 21:6). The psalmist has maintained both inner purity (heart) and outer conduct (hands) — and concludes it was worthless.
14. The contrast with verses 4-5 is deliberate: the wicked have no pain (verse 4) and are not stricken like others (verse 5), but the psalmist is *nagua* ('stricken, plagued') *kol hayyom* ('all day long') and receives *tokhachah* ('punishment, correction') *labbeqarot* ('every morning'). Morning, which should bring fresh mercy, brings only fresh suffering.
15. The verb *bagadti* ('I would have betrayed, dealt treacherously') is a strong word — it is used for marital infidelity, treaty violations, and religious apostasy. The psalmist understands that publicizing his crisis of faith would be a form of violence against the believing community.
16. The word *amal* ('labor, trouble, toil') is the same word used in verse 5 for the suffering the wicked avoid. Now the psalmist's attempt to comprehend the problem is itself *amal* — even thinking about it is exhausting. The problem resists rational solution.
17. The plural *miqdeshei* ('sanctuaries') may refer to the temple complex with its multiple courts, or it may be a plural of majesty. The key point is that the resolution comes not from philosophical reasoning but from worship — from entering God's presence.
18. The word *chalaqot* ('slippery places') connects to the wisdom tradition's warnings about the 'slippery path' (Proverbs 5:6, Jeremiah 23:12). The wicked's prosperity was always precarious — the psalmist simply could not see it until he entered the sanctuary.
19. The word *ke-raga* ('like a moment, in an instant') emphasizes the speed of their collapse. The prosperity that seemed permanent vanishes instantaneously. The triple emphasis — *shammah* ('horror, desolation'), *safu* ('they are swept away'), *tammu* ('they are finished, consumed') — leaves nothing standing.
20. The image of God awakening is anthropomorphic — God does not literally sleep — but it captures the psalmist's perception: the period of the wicked's prosperity felt like God was asleep, and their judgment will feel like God waking up. The same language appears in Psalm 44:24 ('Awake! Why do You sleep, O Lord?').
21. The verb *yitchammets* ('was embittered, was soured') comes from *chamets* ('to be sour, to leaven') — the same root as vinegar. The psalmist's heart had gone sour with envy. The *kilyot* ('kidneys, innermost parts') were considered the seat of deep emotions and conscience in Hebrew anthropology. The psalmist's entire inner life had been corroded by the problem.
22. This verse is the psalm's act of repentance. The crisis of faith described in verses 2-16 is now diagnosed as a failure of perception — not a failure of God. The psalmist takes responsibility for his near-apostasy by calling it what it was: stupidity.
23. The phrase 'You hold my right hand' reverses the image of verse 2 (feet slipping). The hand that was grasping at nothing is now held by God. This is one of the Psalter's most powerful statements of grace — God's grip is stronger than the psalmist's doubt.
24. The phrase *achar kavod* has been translated as 'afterward to glory,' 'after glory,' 'according to glory,' and 'with honor afterward.' The ambiguity may be intentional — the psalmist is reaching beyond what he can clearly articulate, groping toward a hope that the Hebrew Bible's theology of death has not yet fully developed.
25. The verb *chafats* ('to desire, to delight in, to take pleasure in') is a strong word — it describes deep, passionate wanting. The psalmist is not saying he lacks earthly desires; he is saying that compared to God, no earthly desire registers. This is not asceticism but adoration.
26. The parallel between failing flesh and enduring God creates a contrast between what is temporary and what is permanent. The psalmist does not deny mortality; he transcends it by anchoring his identity in something that cannot decay.
27. The verb *hitsmattah* ('You have destroyed, cut off, silenced') is from *tsamat*, meaning to put an end to something decisively. The language of sexual unfaithfulness (*zoneh*) for spiritual apostasy is characteristic of Hosea and Ezekiel but appears here in the Psalms as well.
28. The closing phrase echoes Psalm 71:17-18 — the psalmist will declare God's works to the next generation. The crisis of faith has not destroyed his witness; it has deepened it. He now has something to testify about that he did not have before: how God held him when his feet were slipping.

74

Summary: *A communal lament by Asaph over the destruction of the temple. The enemy has smashed the sanctuary's carved woodwork, set fire to the holy place, and desecrated every meeting place of God in the land. No prophet remains to say how long the desolation will last. The psalmist appeals to God's primordial power as Creator who crushed the sea monsters and established the cosmic order, then pleads: remember Your covenant, rise up, and defend Your cause.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 74 contains one of the Hebrew Bible's most vivid mythological passages (verses 12-17), where God is portrayed as a warrior who crushes Leviathan's heads, splits open springs and rivers, and establishes the boundaries of day and night. This is creation described not as peaceful ordering but as combat — God defeating the chaos monsters to establish the world. The psalmist deploys this ancient combat myth strategically: if You did that, surely You can handle these human enemies. The juxtaposition of cosmic power with national helplessness is the psalm's rhetorical engine.*

Translation Friction: *The psalm assumes a destroyed temple, which most scholars associate with the Babylonian destruction of 586 BCE. However, the Asaph attribution and some linguistic features have led others to propose the Assyrian period or even the Maccabean era. The mythological language of verses 12-17 draws on Canaanite creation mythology (the defeat of Yam/Sea and the multi-headed Lotan/Leviathan known from Ugaritic texts), which the psalmist appropriates for YHWH without apology. This is not syncretism but theological conquest — Israel's God is the one who actually did what the Canaanite myths attributed to Baal.*

Connections: *The Leviathan imagery connects to Job 41, Isaiah 27:1, and the Ugaritic Baal cycle where Baal defeats Lotan (the seven-headed sea serpent). The lament over the destroyed temple parallels Lamentations 1-2 and Psalm 79. The appeal to the covenant (verse 20) connects to the Deuteronomic tradition of covenant faithfulness despite national disaster. The phrase 'How long?' (ad matai) echoes Psalm 13, Psalm 79:5, and Habakkuk 1:2.*

¹A maskil of Asaph.

Why, O God, have You rejected us forever?
Why does Your anger smoke
against the sheep of Your pasture?

²Remember Your congregation that You acquired long ago,
the tribe of Your inheritance that You redeemed —
Mount Zion where You have dwelt.

³Lift Your steps toward the perpetual ruins —
all the destruction the enemy has wrought in the sanctuary.

⁴Your enemies have roared in the midst of Your meeting place;
they set up their own signs as signs.

⁵It was like men wielding axes
in a thicket of trees.

⁶And now — its carved work, all of it,
they smash with hatchet and hammer.

⁷They set Your sanctuary on fire;
to the ground they profaned the dwelling place of Your name.

⁸They said in their hearts, 'Let us crush them altogether.'
They burned every meeting place of God in the land.

⁹We do not see our signs;
there is no longer any prophet,
and no one among us knows how long.

¹⁰How long, O God, will the foe mock?
Will the enemy scorn Your name forever?

¹¹Why do You hold back Your hand?
Your right hand — pull it from Your chest and destroy!

¹²Yet God is my King from of old,
working salvation in the midst of the earth.

¹³You split the sea by Your strength;
You shattered the heads of the sea monsters on the waters.

¹⁴You crushed the heads of Leviathan;
You gave him as food to the creatures of the desert.

¹⁵You split open spring and torrent;
You dried up ever-flowing rivers.

¹⁶Yours is the day, Yours also the night;
You established the light and the sun.

¹⁷You fixed all the boundaries of the earth;
summer and winter — You formed them.

¹⁸Remember this: the enemy has mocked, O LORD,
and a foolish people has scorned Your name.

¹⁹Do not give the life of Your dove to the wild beast;
do not forget the life of Your afflicted ones forever.

²⁰Look to the covenant,
for the dark places of the land are filled
with dens of violence.

²¹Do not let the crushed turn back in shame;
let the afflicted and needy praise Your name.

²²Rise up, O God, defend Your own cause!
Remember the mockery against You
from the foolish all day long.

²³Do not forget the clamor of Your foes —
the uproar of those who rise against You,
which ascends continually.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The term maskil in the superscription likely indicates a skillful or instructive composition. Its exact meaning is debated, but it appears in thirteen psalm superscriptions and may signal a psalm requiring particular artistry in performance.
2. The word shevet ('tribe, rod, staff') here means 'tribe' — the tribe of God's inheritance, meaning Israel as God's own clan or family. The language of qanah ('to acquire, to purchase, to create') echoes Exodus 15:16 and Deuteronomy 32:6.
3. The phrase harimah pe'amekha ('lift Your steps') is a plea for God to physically walk to the ruins and see what has happened. The word mashu'ot ('ruins, desolations') with netsach ('perpetual') suggests the destruction has been standing long enough to feel permanent. God is being invited to survey the damage.
4. The wordplay on otot ('signs') is pointed: God's signs (the covenant markers, the sacred furnishings) have been replaced by the enemy's signs (military standards, pagan emblems). The desecration is total — even the semiotics of the space have been overwritten.
5. The verse is syntactically difficult, but the image is clear: the invaders attacked the temple's ornate woodwork as if they were lumberjacks felling a forest. The carved panels and cedar work that adorned the sanctuary were hacked apart with axes (qardummot). The comparison to forest clearing emphasizes the brutality — sacred art treated as timber.
6. The pittuchim ('carved engravings') likely refer to the elaborate carved panels of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers described in 1 Kings 6:29. The kashil ('hatchet') and keilapot ('hammers, pickaxes') are the blunt instruments of demolition. The beauty that Solomon's artisans spent years creating is being smashed in moments.
7. The phrase la-arets ('to the ground') indicates total destruction — not mere damage but complete demolition. The Babylonian destruction of 586 BCE matches this description precisely (2 Kings 25:9).
8. The phrase kol mo'adei El ba-arets ('every meeting place of God in the land') is significant — it suggests not only the Jerusalem temple but all locations where God was worshiped. If this refers to local sanctuaries, synagogues, or regional gathering places, it indicates systematic, nationwide religious destruction.
9. The absence of prophecy is the most terrifying element. In a culture where prophets mediated God's word, the disappearance of prophetic voices meant the complete breakdown of communication between heaven and earth. Amos 8:11-12 describes this as a 'famine of hearing the words of the LORD.'
10. The phrase ad matai ('how long?') is the quintessential lament question — it appears throughout the Psalms and prophets. The verbs yecharef ('will mock, reproach') and yena'ets ('will scorn, blaspheme') target God's shem ('name') — the enemy's mockery is not merely of Israel but of Israel's God.
11. The image of God hiding His hand in His robe while His people suffer is one of the Psalter's most daring anthropomorphisms. It implies that God has the power to act but is choosing not to — a charge the psalmist levels directly.
12. This verse introduces the mythological hymn that forms the psalm's theological core (verses 12-17). The psalmist counters present despair with memory of God's ultimate demonstrations of power.
13. The tanninim appear in Genesis 1:21 as creatures God creates, but here they appear as enemies God defeats. The two traditions coexist in the Hebrew Bible: creation as peaceful ordering (Genesis 1) and creation as combat victory (Psalm 74, Isaiah 51:9-10, Job 26:12-13).
14. The Ugaritic parallel is striking: KTU 1.5.I.1-3 describes Baal defeating Lotan, the fleeing serpent, the twisting serpent, the tyrant with seven heads. Psalm 74:14 transfers this exact mythology to YHWH. Isaiah 27:1 uses nearly identical language for a future eschatological defeat of Leviathan.
15. The verb baqa'ta ('You split open') describes God creating water sources — springs (ma'yan) and torrents (nachal) — by cracking open the earth. But God also controls water by removing it: hovashta naharot eitan ('You dried up mighty rivers'). God both provides and withholds water. This double mastery over water connects creation to Exodus — splitting the sea and drying the Jordan.
16. The sovereignty extends to time itself. The word ma'or ('luminary, light-bearer') may refer to the moon (as in Genesis 1:16, 'the lesser light'), paired with shemesh ('sun'). God owns every hour and created every source of light. The declaration lekha yom af lekha laylah ('Yours is the day, also Yours the night') means there is no time — not even darkness — outside God's dominion.
17. The rhetorical strategy of verses 12-17 is now complete: the psalmist has established God's absolute sovereignty over chaos monsters, water, time, light, geography, and seasons. The implicit question is: if You command all of this, why do You tolerate the destruction of Your temple?
18. The imperative zekhor ('remember') returns from verse 2. The psalmist uses God's own honor as leverage: it is not merely Israel that has been insulted but YHWH's name. The word naval ('foolish, senseless, morally vile') is the same word used to describe Nabal in 1 Samuel 25:25 — a person whose folly is moral, not intellectual.
19. The turtledove (tor) was also a sacrificial bird used by the poor who could not afford a lamb (Leviticus 5:7). The identification of Israel as a turtledove suggests both vulnerability and sacrificial status — the people have become an offering, but not a willing one.
20. The word ne'ot can mean 'pastures' or 'dwelling places' — both readings work. If 'pastures,' the image is of grazing lands turned into sites of violence; if 'dwelling places,' the dark corners of the land have become dens where cruelty lives.

- 21.** The word *dakh* ('crushed, oppressed, broken') describes someone who has been physically beaten down. The plea is that this person not also be humiliated (*nikhlam*, 'put to shame'). The alternative — *ani ve-eyon yehalelu shemekha* ('the afflicted and needy will praise Your name') — promises that rescue will produce worship. God's intervention serves God's own name.
- 22.** The psalm does not record God's answer. Like many laments, it ends in the act of pleading. The resolution is left to God and to history — the psalmist has made his case and now waits.
- 23.** The psalm's final word is *tamid* ('continually') — the enemies' noise never stops. This is a deliberate contrast with the silence of verse 9 (no prophet, no signs, no knowledge). God's people are silent; God's enemies are loud. The psalm ends with this unbearable imbalance and trusts God to correct it.

75

Summary: *A psalm of divine judgment. After an opening thanksgiving, God speaks directly (verses 3-4), declaring that He will judge with equity at the appointed time and that He is the one who keeps the earth's foundations stable. The psalmist then warns the arrogant not to lift their horns, because exaltation comes from God alone. The central image is the cup of judgment — foaming wine mixed with spices — that the wicked must drain to the dregs. The psalm closes with praise and a promise that the horns of the wicked will be cut off while the horns of the righteous are lifted high.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 75 is one of the rare psalms where God speaks in first person within the body of the poem. God's direct speech in verses 3-4 gives the psalm an oracular quality — the psalmist is not merely praying but reporting what God has said. The image of the cup (verse 9) is one of the Hebrew Bible's most powerful metaphors for judgment: God holds a cup of foaming, spiced wine, and the wicked must drink every drop. This cup reappears in Isaiah 51:17, Jeremiah 25:15-28, and Revelation 14:10. The psalm's theology is compact and unyielding: God alone determines who rises and who falls.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase *al tashchit* ('do not destroy') in the superscription is shared with Psalms 57, 58, and 59. It may refer to a tune, a liturgical instruction, or a thematic marker. Its meaning is uncertain. The shift between speakers in the psalm (congregation in verse 2, God in verses 3-4, the psalmist in verses 5-10) requires careful attention — without quotation marks in the Hebrew, identifying who is speaking depends on context and content.*

Connections: *The cup of judgment imagery connects to Isaiah 51:17-22 (Jerusalem drinks the cup of staggering), Jeremiah 25:15-28 (the cup passed to all nations), Habakkuk 2:16 (the cup of the LORD's right hand), and Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane ('Let this cup pass from me,' Matthew 26:39). The horn imagery connects to Hannah's song (1 Samuel 2:1, 10) and the Magnificat tradition. Psalm 75 answers the plea of Psalm 74 — if Psalm 74 asks 'How long?', Psalm 75 answers 'At the appointed time.'*

¹For the director of music. To 'Do Not Destroy.' A psalm of Asaph. A song.

²We give thanks to You, O God;
we give thanks, for Your name is near.
Your wonders are recounted.

³"When I seize the appointed time,
I Myself will judge with equity."

⁴"When the earth totters with all who dwell in it,
it is I who steady its pillars." *Selah*.

⁵I said to the arrogant, 'Do not boast!'
and to the wicked, 'Do not lift up your horn!'

⁶Do not raise your horn on high;
do not speak with an arrogant neck.

⁷For not from the east or from the west,
and not from the desert comes exaltation —

⁸but God is the judge:
this one He brings low,
and that one He raises up.

⁹For a cup is in the hand of the LORD,
and the wine foams, full of spiced mixture.
He pours from it,
and all the wicked of the earth
must drain its dregs and drink.

¹⁰But I will declare it forever;
I will make music to the God of Jacob.

¹¹All the horns of the wicked I will cut off,
but the horns of the righteous will be raised high.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The superscription contains multiple performance indicators: lamnatse'ach ('for the director'), al tashchit ('do not destroy' — likely a tune name), mizmor ('psalm' — a sung composition with instrumental accompaniment), and shir ('song'). The combination suggests a liturgical piece with specific musical requirements.
2. The verb sipperu ('they recount, they tell') can be read as 'they declare' or 'Your wonders declare' — the subject is ambiguous. Either the community tells of God's wonders, or the wonders themselves serve as testimony.
3. God's direct speech begins here without a speech formula ('God said'). The shift from 'we' (verse 2) to 'I' signals the change in speaker. This oracular style — God speaking within a psalm — appears also in Psalms 46:11, 50:5, 81:7-17, and 82:2-7.
4. The *selah* at the end may indicate a musical interlude or a pause for reflection. Its exact meaning is debated, but its placement after God's declaration of cosmic sovereignty creates a moment of silence that allows the claim to resonate.
5. The horn metaphor is pervasive in the Hebrew Bible: horns represent strength (Deuteronomy 33:17), royal power (1 Samuel 2:10), and aggressive self-assertion. To 'lift the horn' is to claim authority and dominance.
6. The phrase be-tsavvar ataq ('with an arrogant/stiff neck') describes someone who holds their head high in defiance, refusing to bow. The word ataq ('arrogant, presumptuous, old/hardened') suggests stubbornness calcified into permanent posture. The stiff-necked person cannot look down at the vulnerable or up at God — they can only look straight ahead at their own ambition.
7. The four compass directions are reduced to three (east, west, south), with north conspicuously absent. Some scholars suggest this is because God's dwelling was associated with the north (tsafon, cf. Psalm 48:3 and Isaiah 14:13), and the psalmist is about to reveal that exaltation comes from God, not from any earthly direction.
8. This verse is the psalm's theological thesis: sovereignty over human destiny belongs to God alone. It answers the arrogance described in verses 5-6 and provides the foundation for the judgment imagery in verse 9.
9. The cup of wrath becomes a major prophetic image: Jeremiah is told to make all nations drink from God's cup of fury (Jeremiah 25:15-28), and Isaiah tells Jerusalem she has drunk the cup of staggering to its dregs (Isaiah 51:17). In the New Testament, Jesus asks the Father to 'let this cup pass' (Matthew 26:39), identifying the cross with the cup of divine judgment.
10. The psalmist responds to the vision of judgment with worship. The phrase Elohei Ya'aqov ('the God of Jacob') is a covenant name — it connects God's present act of judgment to His ancient relationship with Israel's ancestor. The commitment to declare le-olam ('forever') matches the permanence of God's sovereignty.
11. The verb agaddea ('I will cut off') is from gada, meaning to hew, to chop, to cut down — the same verb used for cutting down Asherah poles and idolatrous pillars (Deuteronomy 7:5). The horns of the wicked are treated as objects of demolition.

76

Summary: *A victory hymn celebrating God's defense of Zion. God is known in Judah, His dwelling is in Salem (Jerusalem), and from Zion He has shattered the weapons of war — the flashing arrows, the shields, the swords, the battle itself. The warriors who came against the city lie stunned and motionless, unable even to lift their hands. The psalm declares that God's rebuke from heaven silences the earth, that He rises in judgment to save the humble, and that even human wrath serves His purposes. All nations are called to bring tribute to the One who is terrifying to kings.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 76 presents God as a warrior of terrifying stillness. He does not fight in the conventional sense — He rebukes, and warriors fall asleep. The 'sleep' of verse 6 (nirdemu, 'they were put into a deep sleep') is not death but paralysis: the enemy soldiers cannot function. God wins by overwhelming the enemy's capacity to act. This is holy war reduced to its theological essence: God does not need Israel's army; He needs only to speak. The psalm may reflect the miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem from Sennacherib's siege (2 Kings 19:35), when the Assyrian army was destroyed overnight without a battle.*

Translation Friction: *The name Salem (Shalem) in verse 3 is an archaic name for Jerusalem, appearing elsewhere only in Genesis 14:18 (Melchizedek, king of Salem). Its use here is deliberately archaic, evoking Jerusalem's pre-Israelite identity as a city of ancient holiness. The phrase sukko ('His shelter/lair') in the same verse uses a word that can mean 'booth' (as in Sukkot) or 'lair' (as of a lion) — the ambiguity is productive, presenting God simultaneously as tent-dweller and predator.*

Connections: *The deliverance of Zion connects to the Zion theology of Psalms 46, 48, and 87 — the conviction that God's presence in Jerusalem makes the city inviolable. The defeat of weapons (verse 4) parallels Psalm 46:10 ('He breaks the bow and shatters the spear'). The phrase nora attah ('You are terrifying') connects to the broader theme of divine terror in Psalm 68:36 and Habakkuk 3:2. The historical background likely involves the Assyrian crisis of 701 BCE (Isaiah 36-37, 2 Kings 18-19).*

¹For the director of music. With stringed instruments. A psalm of Asaph. A song.

²God is known in Judah;
His name is great in Israel.

³His shelter is in Salem,
and His dwelling place in Zion.

⁴There He shattered the flashing arrows of the bow,
the shield, the sword, and the battle itself. Selah.

⁵Radiant are You, majestic,
more than the mountains of prey.

⁶The warriors of bold heart were plundered;
they sank into their sleep,
and none of the soldiers
could lift their hands.

⁷At Your rebuke, O God of Jacob,
both rider and horse lay stunned.

⁸You — You are to be feared!
Who can stand before You
when Your anger burns?

⁹From heaven You proclaimed judgment;
the earth feared and fell silent,

¹⁰when God rose for judgment,
to save all the humble of the earth. Selah.

¹¹For human wrath will praise You;
the remnant of wrath You will wear as a belt.

¹²Make vows and fulfill them to the LORD your God;
let all who surround Him bring tribute
to the One who is to be feared.

¹³He cuts off the spirit of rulers;
He is terrifying to the kings of the earth.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The term *binginot* ('with stringed instruments') indicates accompaniment by the *nevel* (harp) and *kinnor* (lyre). The combination of *mizmor* and *shir* suggests both instrumental and vocal performance.
2. The pairing of Judah and Israel may suggest a pre-schism or reunification context, or it may simply be poetic parallelism using two names for the same people.
3. The name *Shalem* may be related to *shalom* ('peace'), making Jerusalem 'the city of peace' — an ironic name given its violent history. The psalmist may be playing on this: in the city of peace, the God of peace destroys the weapons of war.
4. The word *reshef* can mean 'flame, spark, arrow' and is also the name of a Canaanite deity of plague and war. The psalmist may be deliberately claiming that YHWH defeats not only human weapons but the divine forces the enemies believed were behind them.
5. The phrase *harerei teref* is unique in the Hebrew Bible. Some emend *taf* ('prey') to *ad* ('eternity') or *ered* ('I descend'), but the Masoretic reading is defensible: God is more majestic than the predatory mountains — more dangerous, more powerful, more commanding than the heights where eagles and lions hunt.
6. If this psalm reflects the Sennacherib event of 701 BCE, 2 Kings 19:35 reports that 'the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the Assyrian camp.' The psalmist describes the same event in poetic terms: the soldiers 'slept' and could not fight.
7. The verb *nirdam* ('was put into deep sleep') is related to *tardemah*, the deep sleep God imposed on Adam in Genesis 2:21 and on Abram in Genesis 15:12. It is a divinely induced unconsciousness — not natural sleep but supernatural incapacitation.
8. The doubled *attah... attah* ('You... You') is emphatic — the psalmist points directly at God with awe. The rhetorical question 'who can stand?' (*mi ya'amod lefanekha*) expects the answer 'no one.' When God's *af* ('anger, nose, wrath') is aroused, every human position collapses.
9. The verb *hishma'ta* ('You caused to be heard, You proclaimed') indicates that God's judgment was audible — it came as a sound from heaven. The earth's response is twofold: *yar'ah* ('it feared') and *shaqatah* ('it fell silent, it was still'). Terror produces silence — the entire created order holds its breath when God speaks judgment.
10. The *anvavim* ('humble ones') are those who have been bowed down by oppression and who wait for God's deliverance. They are the theological heirs of the *aniyyim* ('afflicted') in Psalm 72:2, 4, 12-14.
11. This verse has been variously translated, with some reading *tachgor* as 'You will restrain' rather than 'You will gird Yourself with.' The image of God wearing human wrath as a belt is striking: it means nothing escapes God's sovereignty, not even the forces arrayed against Him.
12. The imperative *nidru ve-shallemu* ('vow and pay') calls for fulfilled commitment — promises to God must be kept. The phrase *kol sevivav* ('all around Him') includes not just Israelites but all surrounding nations. The word *shai* ('tribute, gift') is the same term used for the gifts brought to Solomon (Psalm 72:10). The designation *la-mora* ('to the feared One, to the Awesome One') closes the psalm on the note of terror that has been its consistent theme.
13. The verb *batsar* ('to cut off, to harvest grapes, to fortify') here means 'to clip, to restrain, to cut short.' The image is of a vintner cutting grape clusters — God harvests the arrogance of rulers as easily as cutting fruit from a vine.

77

Summary: *A psalm of Asaph that moves from personal anguish to cosmic memory. The psalmist cries out to God at night, his spirit fainting, his hands stretched out without rest. He torments himself with questions: Has God rejected forever? Has His faithful love ceased? Has He forgotten mercy? Then the psalm pivots sharply at verse 11: 'I will remember the deeds of the LORD.' The second half recounts God's power at the Red Sea — thunder, lightning, shaking earth, waters writhing in fear — culminating in the declaration that God led His people like a flock through the hand of Moses and Aaron.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 77 is constructed around a dramatic psychological pivot. Verses 2-10 describe a crisis so severe that even the act of remembering God causes pain (verse 4, 'I think of God and I groan'). The psalmist's questions in verses 8-10 are among the most daring in the Psalter — he asks whether God's chesed has permanently ceased, whether God's promise has failed, whether God has forgotten how to be gracious. These are not rhetorical questions; they feel like genuine, agonized uncertainty. Then verse 11 turns everything with the word ezkorah ('I will remember'). The same faculty that produced pain (remembering God and groaning) becomes the instrument of rescue (remembering God's deeds). Memory itself is redeemed.*

Translation Friction: *The Hebrew text of verse 11 contains a significant textual note. The word shanot ('years' or 'the changing of') has been read as both 'the years of the right hand of the Most High' and 'the changing (i.e., the failing) of the right hand of the Most High.' The Masoretic marginal note identifies this as a verse boundary between crisis and resolution: the first reading belongs to the lament, the second to the turning point. We follow the Masoretic verse division. The theophany in verses 17-20 draws on the same storm-god imagery found in Canaanite religion and in other biblical theophanies (Judges 5, Habakkuk 3, Psalm 18).*

Connections: *The Red Sea theophany connects to Exodus 14-15, Habakkuk 3:8-15, and Psalm 114. The questions about God's chesed (verse 9) echo the crisis of Psalm 89:50 and Lamentations 3:22. The resolution through memory anticipates Psalm 78's extended historical retrospective. The final verse mentioning Moses and Aaron connects to Psalm 99:6 and the priestly-prophetic tradition. The storm theophany connects to Psalm 18:8-16 and Psalm 29.*

¹For the director of music. According to Jeduthun. A psalm of Asaph.

²My voice is to God, and I cry out;
my voice is to God — may He hear me!

³In the day of my distress I sought the Lord;
my hand was stretched out at night without rest.
My soul refused to be comforted.

⁴I think of God and I groan;
I meditate, and my spirit faints. Selah.

⁵You hold my eyelids open;
I am so troubled that I cannot speak.

⁶I consider the days of old,
the years of ages past.

⁷I recall my song in the night;
I meditate in my heart;
my spirit searches intently.

⁸Will the Lord reject forever?
Will He never again show favor?

⁹Has His faithful love ceased forever?
Has His promise come to an end for all generations?

¹⁰Has God forgotten to be gracious?
Has He in anger shut up His compassion? Selah.

¹¹And I said, 'This is my grief:
that the right hand of the Most High has changed.'

¹²I will remember the deeds of the LORD;
yes, I will remember Your wonders of old.

¹³I will meditate on all Your work
and reflect on Your mighty deeds.

¹⁴Your way, O God, is holy.
What god is as great as our God?

¹⁵You are the God who does wonders;
You have made Your strength known among the peoples.

¹⁶You redeemed Your people with Your arm —
the children of Jacob and Joseph. Selah.

¹⁷The waters saw You, O God —
the waters saw You and writhed;
the very depths trembled.

¹⁸The clouds poured out water;
the skies gave forth thunder;
Your arrows flew in every direction.

¹⁹The voice of Your thunder was in the whirlwind;
lightning lit up the world;
the earth trembled and shook.

²⁰Your way was through the sea,
Your path through the mighty waters,
and Your footprints were not known.

²¹You led Your people like a flock
by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Jeduthun was one of the three chief musicians appointed by David alongside Asaph and Heman (1 Chronicles 25:1-6). The phrase *al yedutun* may mean 'in the manner of Jeduthun' or 'to the tune of Jeduthun' — indicating a musical tradition associated with this Levitical guild.
2. The verb *tsa'aq* ('to cry out') is the specific vocabulary of distress-calling in the Hebrew Bible — it is the cry of the oppressed to a superior who has the power to intervene. It is not prayer as meditation but prayer as emergency alert.

3. The verb *niggerah* is often emended to *niggarah* ('was poured out') or read as 'streamed' (referring to tears). The Masoretic pointing supports 'was stretched out' — hands extended upward in the posture of supplication throughout the night.
4. The verb *hamah* ('to groan, to murmur, to be in turmoil') describes an involuntary sound of distress — it is what happens when thought becomes unbearable and the body responds with noise. The verb *ataf* ('to be faint, to be wrapped, to be enveloped') suggests being smothered or overwhelmed.
5. The attribution of insomnia to God is a bold theological move — it means God is not merely absent but actively involved in the psalmist's suffering. This is harder to bear than divine indifference.
6. The psalmist reaches backward: *yamim mi-qedem* ('days from of old') and *shenot olamim* ('years of eternity'). He is searching history for precedent — has God ever acted like this before? Was there a time when God was faithful? The search through memory is both an act of desperation and a prelude to the resolution that comes in verses 11-12.
7. The progression from external cry (verse 2) to internal meditation (verse 7) shows the psalmist moving deeper inward, trying every avenue of approach to the problem. Neither outward prayer nor inward reflection has produced resolution.
8. These questions are not answered within the psalm. The resolution comes not from answers but from a change in the direction of memory — from remembering personal suffering to remembering God's historical acts.
9. The word *chesed* is one of the most important words in the Hebrew Bible and resists single-word translation. It combines loyalty, love, faithfulness, kindness, and covenant commitment. To ask whether *chesed* has ceased is to ask whether God's fundamental character has changed.
10. The word *rachamim* ('compassion') derives from *rechem* ('womb') — it is the visceral, maternal feeling of tenderness. To ask whether God has shut His *rachamim* is to ask whether the most instinctive form of divine love has been suppressed.
11. The Masoretic tradition places a verse break here that separates the lament (verses 2-11a) from the resolution (verses 11b-21). Some scholars read *shenot* as 'years' and connect it to verse 12: 'I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High' — making it the first statement of recovery rather than the last statement of despair. Both readings are theologically coherent.
12. The doubled 'I will remember' (*ezkor... ezkerah*) mirrors the doubled 'my voice to God' in verse 2. The psalm's structure is built on repetition with redirection: the same faculties (voice, memory) that expressed the crisis now express the resolution.
13. The verb *hagiti* ('I will meditate, I will murmur') is the same verb used in Psalm 1:2 for meditating on Torah. The psalmist turns his restless, sleepless mind toward a new subject: God's *po'olekha* ('Your work') and *alilotekha* ('Your deeds, Your exploits'). The cure for destructive meditation is redirected meditation.
14. The echo of Exodus 15:11 ('Who is like You among the gods, O LORD?') is deliberate — the psalmist is moving toward the Red Sea memory, and the language of the Song of the Sea begins to surface.
15. The phrase *oseh fele* ('who does wonders') is a title — it defines God by His characteristic action. The verb *hoda'ta* ('You have made known') means God's power is not hidden but publicly displayed *ba-ammim* ('among the peoples') — not just Israel but the nations.
16. The mention of Joseph alongside Jacob suggests the psalmist has the entire twelve-tribe nation in view, not just Judah. Joseph was the ancestor of Ephraim and Manasseh, the dominant northern tribes.
17. The personification of water 'seeing' God and responding with terror is one of the most powerful images in the Psalter. Water, in the ancient Near Eastern worldview, represented chaos — and here chaos itself is afraid of God.
18. The theophany builds: *zorm* means 'to pour, to stream' — the clouds become waterfalls. The *shekhaqim* ('skies, clouds') give *qol* ('voice, thunder'). God's *chatsatsekha* ('Your arrows') are lightning bolts that *yithallakhu* ('go about, fly in all directions'). The storm is God's chariot, His weapon, His mode of transport.
19. The word *galgal* is sometimes translated 'heaven' or 'whirlwind.' Its root meaning is 'something that rolls' — a wheel, a whirlwind, a rolling thunder. The image is of God's voice rolling across the sky like a wheel of sound.
20. The invisible footprints are a metaphor for divine hiddenness: God acts, but He does not leave the kind of evidence that eliminates the need for faith. The psalmist in verses 2-10 was looking for visible signs and finding none; now he understands that God's way has always been through waters that close behind Him.
21. The abrupt ending is deliberate. The psalm does not resolve into a statement of certainty about the present — it resolves into a memory of the past and an implied trust for the future. The psalmist's insomnia, his questions, his anguish — none of them are explicitly answered. What changes is the direction of his gaze: from inward suffering to backward memory to forward trust.

78

Summary: *A vast historical psalm recounting Israel's story from Egypt through the wilderness to the election of David and Zion. Asaph narrates the Exodus plagues, the splitting of the sea, manna and quail in the desert, the people's rebellion, God's anger and compassion, and the final choice of Judah over Ephraim as the seat of God's presence. The psalm's purpose is pedagogical: it is a teaching poem (maskil) designed to transmit the nation's sacred history to the next generation so they will not repeat their ancestors' failures.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 78 is the second-longest psalm in the Psalter (after Psalm 119) and functions as a condensed, interpreted history of Israel. Its most striking feature is its relentless honesty about Israel's failure. The nation is described as a treacherous bow that misses its target (verse 57), a generation whose heart was not steadfast (verse 37), people who tested God again and again (verse 41). Yet God's response is not abandonment but restrained compassion: 'He, being compassionate, atoned for their iniquity and did not destroy them; many times He turned back His anger' (verse 38). The psalm's structure builds toward the rejection of Ephraim/Shiloh and the election of Judah/Zion/David — a theological interpretation of history that explains why the northern shrine fell and the southern dynasty endured.*

Translation Friction: *The psalm's clear anti-Ephraimite stance (verse 9-11, 67) reflects a Judahite perspective that reads the fall of the northern shrine at Shiloh as divine judgment. This is theological interpretation of history, not neutral reporting. The plague narrative (verses 44-51) follows a different order than Exodus, omitting some plagues and rearranging others — suggesting the psalmist is drawing on an independent tradition or reshaping the material for poetic purposes. The description of God as a warrior who 'awoke as from sleep' (verse 65) is anthropomorphic language that some find theologically uncomfortable.*

Connections: *The psalm parallels the historical retrospectives in Deuteronomy 32 (the Song of Moses), Nehemiah 9, and Psalm 106. The manna narrative connects to Exodus 16 and Numbers 11. The plague sequence corresponds loosely to Exodus 7-12. The election of David and Zion connects to 2 Samuel 5-7. The phrase 'a deceitful bow' (verse 57) reappears in Hosea 7:16. The pedagogical framework echoes Deuteronomy 6:6-9 and its command to teach the next generation.*

¹A maskil of Asaph.

Listen, my people, to my teaching;
turn your ears to the words of my mouth.

²I will open my mouth in a parable;
I will pour out riddles from of old.

³What we have heard and known,
what our ancestors told us —

⁴we will not hide them from their children.
To the coming generation we will recount
the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD,
His strength and the wonders He has done.

⁵He established a testimony in Jacob
and set a law in Israel,
which He commanded our ancestors
to make known to their children,

⁶so that the next generation would know —
children yet to be born —
and they would rise and tell their own children,

⁷so that they would put their confidence in God
and not forget the works of God,
but keep His commandments —

⁸and not be like their ancestors —
a stubborn and rebellious generation,
a generation that did not prepare its heart
and whose spirit was not faithful to God.

⁹The sons of Ephraim, armed with bows,
turned back on the day of battle.

¹⁰They did not keep the covenant of God
and refused to walk in His law.

¹¹They forgot His deeds
and the wonders He had shown them.

¹²Before their ancestors He did wonders
in the land of Egypt, in the fields of Zoan.

¹³He split the sea and brought them through;
He made the waters stand like a wall.

¹⁴He led them with a cloud by day
and all night with a light of fire.

¹⁵He split rocks in the wilderness
and gave them drink as from the great deep.

¹⁶He brought streams from the crag
and made water flow down like rivers.

¹⁷Yet they kept on sinning against Him,
rebellious against the Most High in the dry land.

¹⁸They tested God in their hearts
by demanding food for their appetite.

¹⁹They spoke against God, saying,
'Can God set a table in the wilderness?'

²⁰Yes, He struck the rock and water gushed out,
torrents overflowed.
But can He also give bread?
Can He provide meat for His people?

²¹Therefore the LORD heard and was furious;
fire blazed against Jacob,
and anger rose against Israel,
²²because they did not believe in God
and did not trust in His salvation.
²³Yet He commanded the clouds above
and opened the doors of heaven.
²⁴He rained down manna upon them to eat
and gave them the grain of heaven.
²⁵Mortals ate the bread of the mighty;
He sent them food in abundance.
²⁶He set loose the east wind in the heavens
and drove the south wind by His power.
²⁷He rained meat on them like dust,
winged birds like the sand of the seas.
²⁸He made them fall in the midst of their camp,
all around their dwellings.
²⁹They ate and were fully satisfied;
He brought them what they craved.
³⁰They had not yet turned from their craving —
the food was still in their mouths —
³¹when the anger of God rose against them.
He killed the sturdiest among them
and struck down the young men of Israel.
³²Despite all this, they kept sinning
and did not believe in His wonders.
³³So He consumed their days in futility
and their years in sudden terror.
³⁴When He killed them, they sought Him;
they turned back and searched earnestly for God.
³⁵They remembered that God was their rock,
that the Most High God was their redeemer.
³⁶But they flattered Him with their mouths
and lied to Him with their tongues.
³⁷Their heart was not steadfast with Him,
and they were not faithful to His covenant.

³⁸But He, being compassionate, atoned for their iniquity
and did not destroy them.

Many times He turned back His anger
and did not rouse all His wrath.

³⁹He remembered that they were flesh,
a breath that passes and does not return.

⁴⁰How often they rebelled against Him in the wilderness
and grieved Him in the wasteland!

⁴¹Again and again they tested God
and provoked the Holy One of Israel.

⁴²They did not remember His hand,
the day He redeemed them from the foe —

⁴³when He set His signs in Egypt,
His wonders in the fields of Zoan.

⁴⁴He turned their rivers to blood
and their streams so they could not drink.

⁴⁵He sent swarms among them that devoured them,
and frogs that destroyed them.

⁴⁶He gave their crops to the grasshopper
and their labor to the locust.

⁴⁷He killed their vines with hail
and their sycamores with frost.

⁴⁸He gave over their cattle to the hail
and their livestock to bolts of lightning.

⁴⁹He sent against them His burning anger —
fury, rage, and distress —
a company of destroying angels.

⁵⁰He cleared a path for His anger.
He did not spare their lives from death
but gave them over to the plague.

⁵¹He struck every firstborn in Egypt,
the firstfruits of their vigor in the tents of Ham.

⁵²He led His people out like sheep
and guided them like a flock through the wilderness.

⁵³He led them in safety and they were not afraid,
but the sea covered their enemies.

⁵⁴He brought them to His holy territory,
to the mountain His right hand had acquired.

⁵⁵He drove out nations before them
and apportioned them an inheritance by measured line;
He settled the tribes of Israel in their tents.

⁵⁶Yet they tested and rebelled against the Most High God
and did not keep His decrees.

⁵⁷They turned back and were faithless like their ancestors;
they twisted like a treacherous bow.

⁵⁸They provoked Him with their high places
and made Him jealous with their carved images.

⁵⁹God heard and was furious;
He utterly rejected Israel.

⁶⁰He abandoned the tabernacle at Shiloh,
the tent He had pitched among mortals.

⁶¹He gave His strength into captivity
and His splendor into the enemy's hand.

⁶²He gave His people over to the sword
and was furious with His inheritance.

⁶³Fire consumed their young men,
and their young women had no wedding songs.

⁶⁴His priests fell by the sword,
and their widows could not weep.

⁶⁵Then the Lord awoke as from sleep,
like a warrior shouting from wine.

⁶⁶He struck His enemies from behind;
He put them to lasting shame.

⁶⁷He rejected the tent of Joseph
and did not choose the tribe of Ephraim.

⁶⁸He chose the tribe of Judah,
Mount Zion, which He loved.

⁶⁹He built His sanctuary like the heights,
like the earth He established forever.

⁷⁰and took him from the sheepfolds.
He chose David His servant

71 From following the nursing ewes He brought him
to shepherd Jacob His people
and Israel His inheritance.

72 He shepherded them with a blameless heart
and guided them with the skill of his hands.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The word torah in its original sense means 'instruction, direction, guidance' — from yarah ('to throw, to shoot, to direct'). The broader meaning of 'the Law of Moses' developed later. Here it refers to the pedagogical content of the psalm.
2. Matthew 13:35 quotes this verse as fulfilled in Jesus' use of parables, connecting the psalm's teaching method to the gospel tradition. In its original context, the 'parable' is the entire national history read as a lesson.
3. The chain of transmission is explicit: ancestors (avoteinu) told the current generation (shamanu, 'we heard'), and the current generation will tell the next (verse 4). This is oral tradition's self-conscious claim to legitimacy — the story has been faithfully transmitted.
4. This verse establishes the psalm's primary purpose: intergenerational transmission of sacred history. The concern is not antiquarian but existential — if the next generation does not know this story, they will repeat the failures described in what follows.
5. The parallel edut ('testimony, witness') and torah ('law, instruction') refers to God's covenant requirements — the commands and teachings that define Israel's relationship with God. The transmission is not optional but commanded (tsivvah): teaching the next generation is itself a divine mandate.
6. The chain extends three generations: the current generation tells the next, who tells the one after that. The phrase banim yivvaledu ('children yet to be born') acknowledges that the audience includes people who do not yet exist. History is told for the sake of the unborn.
7. The three-part purpose: kislam ('their confidence') in God, not forgetting God's deeds, and keeping God's commands. Memory and obedience are linked: to forget what God has done leads directly to disobeying what God has commanded.
8. The phrase dor sorer u-moreh echoes Deuteronomy 21:18, where the stubborn and rebellious son is the extreme case of covenant disloyalty within a family. Applied to a generation, it means the entire people behaved like a delinquent child toward their divine parent.
9. The historical reference is obscure — no specific battle of Ephraimite retreat is recorded. The charge may be metaphorical: Ephraim was equipped for covenant faithfulness but turned away when tested. The military language describes spiritual failure.
10. The accusation is twofold: covenant violation (lo shamru berit Elohim) and Torah rejection (uvtorato me'anu lalekhet, 'in His instruction they refused to walk'). Walking (halakh) is the standard metaphor for living according to God's commands — they refused to move in the direction God indicated.
11. Forgetfulness is the root sin in Deuteronomistic theology. The verb vayishkechu ('they forgot') is the opposite of the remembering commanded in verses 3-7. The cycle is clear: ancestors witnessed wonders, forgot them, and fell into rebellion. The psalm exists to break this cycle.
12. Zoan (Tsoan) is the Hebrew name for the Egyptian city of Tanis in the eastern Nile Delta, near the traditional location of the Israelite settlement in Goshen. By naming the specific location, the psalmist anchors the miraculous events in a real, identifiable place.
13. The verb baqa ('He split') is the same used in Psalm 74:15 for splitting springs open. The word ned ('heap, wall, dam') describes water standing upright in defiance of gravity — the same image as Exodus 15:8. The sea becomes architecture, solid walls flanking the path of escape.
14. The pillar of cloud (Exodus 13:21-22) guided by day, the pillar of fire by night. God provided continuous navigation — no hour was uncovered. The phrase kol hallaylah ('all the night') emphasizes that darkness offered no gap in divine guidance.
15. The verb yevaqqea ('He split') describes God cracking open tsurim ('rocks, cliffs') to produce water. The comparison ki-tehomot rabbah ('as from the great deep') is hyperbolic: the water from the rock was as abundant as the primordial ocean. This refers to the Meribah/Massah incidents (Exodus 17:1-7, Numbers 20:1-13).
16. The nozelim ('streams, flowing waters') from the sela ('crag, cliff') were not a trickle but kanneharot ('like rivers'). The miracle's scale matches the need — water for an entire nation in the desert required rivers, not drops.
17. The phrase vayyosifu od lachato ('they continued still to sin') uses the construction of ongoing, compounding rebellion — sin upon sin. The word tsiyyah ('dry land, parched ground') is ironic: God just provided rivers from rock, and they respond by rebelling in the very place of His provision.
18. The verb vaynassu ('they tested') is from nasah — the same verb used for God's testing of Abraham (Genesis 22:1). Here the roles are reversed: the people test God. The demand for okhel lenafesham ('food for their appetite/soul') is not about survival but about desire — they want more than manna.

19. The phrase 'Can God set a table in the wilderness?' becomes an ironic echo throughout the psalm. God can set a table anywhere — and He does, with manna and quail — but the provision does not cure the people's distrust.
20. The people concede the water miracle (verse 15-16) but doubt the next provision. Each miracle is acknowledged but deemed insufficient for the next challenge. Their faith is always one step behind God's action.
21. God's response is immediate: shama vayyit'abbar ('He heard and was furious'). The verb it'abbar ('to become angry, to overflow with wrath') suggests anger that erupts uncontrollably. The 'fire' (esh) may be literal (Numbers 11:1-3 records fire consuming the camp's edges) or metaphorical for divine wrath.
22. The double negative — lo he'eminu ('they did not believe') and lo batchu ('they did not trust') — diagnoses the core problem: unbelief. The specific object of unbelief is bishu'ato ('in His salvation') — they doubted God's ability and willingness to rescue.
23. The 'doors of heaven' imagery appears in Genesis 7:11 (the flood) and Malachi 3:10 (blessing). God's provision comes from the same heavenly reservoir as His judgment — the door swings both ways.
24. The word man ('manna') is explained in Exodus 16:15 through the question man hu ('What is it?'). The parallel term degan shamayim ('grain of heaven') elevates manna to the status of celestial food — bread from God's own table. It is not emergency rations but heaven's own produce.
25. The phrase lechem abbirim ('bread of the mighty ones') has been interpreted as 'bread of angels' (so the LXX and KJV), 'bread of the mighty,' or 'bread of the strong.' The word abbirim can refer to angels, warriors, or bulls. The point is that this food belongs to a higher order of being — humans ate what was not originally meant for them. The word lasova ('to satisfaction, to fullness') emphasizes abundance.
26. God controls the winds as instruments: the qadim ('east wind') and teman ('south wind') are dispatched to carry the quail. The verb yassa ('He set in motion, He caused to journey') presents the wind as a traveling agent sent on a mission.
27. The comparisons — ke-afar ('like dust') and ke-chol yammim ('like the sand of the seas') — are the standard Hebrew idioms for uncountable abundance (Genesis 13:16, 22:17). The quail were not a few birds but a blizzard of meat covering the camp.
28. The quail landed beqerev machanahu ('in the middle of their camp') and saviv lemishkenotav ('around their tents'). The provision was delivered directly to their doors — they did not have to go far to gather it.
29. The word ta'avatam ('their craving, their desire') is from avah ('to desire, to crave') — the same root used for the place name Qivrot hat-Ta'avah ('Graves of Craving') in Numbers 11:34. God gave them exactly what they wanted, and the getting proved deadly.
30. The phrase lo zaru mitta'avatam ('they had not turned away from their craving') means the desire was still active, undiminished even by receiving what was desired. This is the nature of craving: fulfillment does not satisfy it. And then judgment arrives while the food is literally still in their mouths.
31. The word mishmanneihem ('their sturdiest, their fattest, their most robust') describes the healthiest members of the community — those who should have been least vulnerable. The bachurei Yisrael ('young men of Israel') were the prime of the nation. God's judgment targeted strength itself, proving that no human vitality can resist divine anger.
32. The phrase bekol zot ('despite all this, in spite of all this') is the psalm's refrain of astonishment: despite provision, despite judgment, despite everything, the pattern continued. Rebellion was not a one-time failure but a chronic condition.
33. The word hevel ('vanity, breath, futility') is Ecclesiastes' signature word — here it describes days that amount to nothing. Their years ended in behalah ('terror, sudden destruction'). The wilderness generation's forty years of wandering are summarized in a single devastating couplet.
34. The bitter irony: only death prompted repentance. The verb darash ('to seek, to inquire') and shichar ('to search earnestly, to seek early') describe intense pursuit of God — but only after judgment had fallen. Their piety was reactive, not proactive.
35. Under duress, memory returned: Elohim tsuram ('God was their rock') and El Elyon go'alam ('the Most High God was their redeemer'). But the next verse reveals that this memory was superficial — it produced flattery rather than genuine repentance.
36. The accusation that Israel lied to God is one of the psalm's most shocking moments. It implies that religious speech can be false even when directed at the omniscient deity — that humans are capable of praying without meaning what they say.
37. The phrase libbam lo nakhon immo ('their heart was not established with Him') echoes verse 8 — the same diagnosis applied to the same chronic condition. Faithlessness to the berit ('covenant') is the root: the external performance of religion without internal commitment.
38. The theology of divine restraint in this verse anticipates Paul's argument in Romans 9:22 about God's patience with 'vessels of wrath.' The psalmist's point is not that God lacks anger but that His compassion repeatedly overrides it.
39. This verse echoes Psalm 103:14-16 ('He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust'). God's memory of human frailty becomes the ground of mercy — He does not expect more than flesh can deliver.
40. The verb ya'atsi'vuhu ('they grieved Him, they caused Him pain') attributes emotional response to God. Israel's rebellion does not merely violate a contract; it wounds a person. The yeshimon ('wasteland, desolation') is the harshest desert terrain — rebellion in the place of maximum dependence.
41. The phrase vayyashuvu vaynassu ('they turned back and tested') indicates repetitive behavior — it happened over and over. The verb hitvu (from tavah, 'to mark, to set a limit, to provoke') means they 'set limits' on the Qadosh Yisrael ('Holy One of Israel') — they defined what God could and

could not do based on their own expectations. Limiting God is the theological sin at the heart of their rebellion.

42. Forgetfulness again: lo zakhru et yado ('they did not remember His hand'). The 'hand' of God (yad) is His power in action — specifically, the power displayed at the Exodus. The yom ('day') when He padam ('redeemed them') from the tsar ('adversary, foe') is the foundational event. What follows (verses 43-51) is the psalmist's retelling of the plagues to remind them of what they forgot.
43. The retelling returns to Zoan (verse 12) — the Egyptian city in the delta region. The otot ('signs') and moftim ('wonders') are the plagues, now recounted in a sequence that differs from Exodus.
44. The first plague: water to blood (Exodus 7:14-25). The ye'oreihem ('their rivers/canals') is the Nile and its channels — the lifeblood of Egyptian civilization. Turning it to dam ('blood') struck at Egypt's most essential resource.
45. The arov ('swarm') — the fourth plague (Exodus 8:20-32) — may refer to flies, mosquitoes, or mixed swarms of insects. The tsefardea ('frogs') — the second plague — destroyed their land. The order differs from Exodus, suggesting the psalmist is grouping by poetic effect rather than chronological sequence.
46. The chasil ('grasshopper, locust') and arbeh ('locust') consumed yevulam ('their produce') and yegi'am ('their toil, the fruit of their labor'). The eighth plague (Exodus 10:1-20) destroyed agriculture — the stored product of human effort devoured by insects.
47. The seventh plague: hail (Exodus 9:13-35). The gafen ('grapevine') and shiqmah ('sycamore fig') were valuable agricultural crops. The chanamal ('frost, sleet') is a rare word, possibly referring to ice storms or severe hail.
48. The verb vayyasger ('He delivered over, He handed over') is the language of judicial sentencing — God formally transferred the Egyptians' livestock to destruction. The reshafim ('lightning bolts, flames') extend the hailstorm to include electrical strikes.
49. The phrase mal'akhei ra'im is unique to this verse and has generated significant discussion. The 'evil' is not moral wickedness in the angels but calamity inflicted by them — they are agents of divine judgment, not demonic beings.
50. The verb yefalles ('He leveled, He made straight, He cleared a path') pictures God removing every obstacle between His anger and its target. The dever ('plague, pestilence') — the fifth plague (Exodus 9:1-7) — was the instrument of execution.
51. The designation of Egypt as 'tents of Ham' connects to the Table of Nations in Genesis 10, where Mitsrayim (Egypt) is listed as a son of Ham. The archaic, genealogical language adds weight to the historical sweep of the narrative.
52. The shepherd metaphor returns (cf. Psalm 77:21). The contrast is stark: Egypt's firstborn are dead; Israel's flock is alive and moving. God destroys one nation's future to preserve another's.
53. The juxtaposition is absolute: Israel walks safely (lavetach, 'in security'); the sea covers (kissah, 'engulfed, overwhelmed') their enemies. Safety for one and destruction for the other happen simultaneously in the same body of water.
54. The gevul qodsho ('the border/territory of His holiness') is the promised land, and specifically har zeh ('this mountain') — either Zion or the entire hill country of Canaan. God's right hand (yemin) qantah ('acquired, purchased') this mountain — it belongs to God by right of acquisition.
55. The verb vayyegaresh ('He drove out') describes the conquest. The chevel nachalah ('measuring line of inheritance') refers to the land allotment — each tribe received its territory measured by cord. The tribes now dwell be-aholeihem ('in their tents') — in the former dwellings of the displaced nations.
56. The cycle repeats: even after settlement in the promised land, the pattern of testing (vaynassu) and rebelling (vayyamru) continues. The edot ('testimonies, decrees') are God's covenant stipulations — the conditions of the relationship. They ignored them.
57. Hosea 7:16 uses nearly identical language: 'They turn, but not upward; they are like a treacherous bow.' The image may have been a common prophetic metaphor for Israel's unreliability — a nation that appeared functional but consistently missed its mark.
58. The bamot ('high places') were the local sanctuaries where Canaanite-influenced worship occurred. The pesilim ('carved images, idols') were the physical representations of other gods. The verb yaqni'uhu ('they made Him jealous') uses the language of marriage: Israel's idolatry is adultery, and God responds with the jealousy of a betrayed spouse (cf. Exodus 20:5, 'I the LORD your God am a jealous God').
59. The verb vayyit'abbar ('He was furious, He overflowed with anger') is the same as verse 21. But this time the consequence is more severe: vayyim'as me'od be-Yisrael ('He utterly rejected Israel'). The verb ma'as ('to reject, to refuse, to despise') is the language of covenant termination — not discipline but rejection.
60. Jeremiah explicitly references Shiloh's destruction as a warning to Jerusalem: 'Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first, and see what I did to it' (Jeremiah 7:12). The psalm uses the same event to explain why God chose Judah over Ephraim.
61. The 'strength' (uzzo) and 'splendor' (tif'arto) refer to the ark of the covenant, captured by the Philistines in 1 Samuel 4:11. The ark was the physical symbol of God's presence and power. God allowed His own symbol to be taken — the ultimate expression of judgment on His people.
62. The parallel between 'His people' (ammo) and 'His inheritance' (nachalato) emphasizes that these are not strangers but God's own possession. The verse describes the battle of Aphek (1 Samuel 4:1-11) where thirty thousand Israelite soldiers fell.
63. The 'fire' consuming bachurav ('His young men') is war. The betulotav ('His young women') lo hullalu ('were not praised/celebrated in wedding songs'). The verb hillel in this context refers to the wedding celebration — with so many young men dead, marriages did not happen. The social

fabric collapsed.

64. Hophni and Phinehas, the priests who accompanied the ark, died at Aphek (1 Samuel 4:11). The phrase *almanotav lo tivkeinah* ('their widows did not weep') likely means the death was so sudden and the disaster so overwhelming that there was no time for proper mourning — or that the widows themselves were killed or captured.
65. This is one of the most daring anthropomorphisms in the Hebrew Bible. Psalm 44:24 pleads 'Awake! Why do You sleep, O Lord?' — here the psalmist reports that God actually did wake up. The metaphor serves the narrative: the period of judgment felt like divine slumber, and God's re-engagement felt like a warrior's battle cry.
66. The phrase *vayyakh tsarav achor* ('He struck His enemies in the rear') refers to the Philistine plague described in 1 Samuel 5:6-12, where God struck the Philistines with tumors (*ofalim*) in their hindquarters. The *cherpat olam* ('perpetual reproach') means the shame was not temporary but defining.
67. This verse is the psalm's political-theological thesis: the fall of Shiloh and the northern shrine was not random but an act of divine election. God actively chose to reject Ephraim and actively chose Judah — this is the explanation for the Davidic dynasty and the Jerusalem temple.
68. The transition from 'rejected Ephraim' to 'chose Judah' mirrors the biblical pattern of divine election: God passes over the expected choice (the firstborn, the older, the stronger) in favor of the unexpected. This pattern runs from Jacob/Esau through David (the youngest son) to Zion (a relatively insignificant hill).
69. The sanctuary (*miqdash*) is compared to *kemo ramim* ('like the heights, like high places') — either heavenly heights or mountain peaks. The second comparison *ke-erets yesadah le-olam* ('like the earth He founded forever') equates the temple's permanence with the earth's — God's dwelling is as enduring as creation itself. This confidence will be tested by the destruction of 586 BCE.
70. The connection between David the shepherd and God the shepherd (Psalm 23, Psalm 77:21, Psalm 78:52) is deliberate: God chose a shepherd to be king because kingship is shepherding. The ideal ruler tends, feeds, and protects a flock.
71. The image of David following nursing ewes echoes 2 Samuel 7:8, where God reminds David: 'I took you from the pasture, from following the flock.' The psalm's conclusion deliberately parallels God's own words to David.
72. The psalm that began with a call to teach the next generation ends with the model of what faithful leadership looks like. The entire historical sweep — Egypt, Exodus, wilderness, conquest, Shiloh, rejection, election — converges on this single image: a shepherd with a blameless heart and skilled hands. This is what the next generation needs to know.

79

Summary: A communal lament over the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. The nations have invaded God's inheritance, defiled the sanctuary, reduced Jerusalem to rubble, and left the bodies of God's servants as food for vultures and wild animals. The blood of the faithful runs like water around Jerusalem with no one to bury the dead. The psalmist pleads for God's compassion, asks how long His jealousy will burn, calls for vengeance on the nations that do not know God, and appeals to God's own reputation among the peoples. The psalm closes with a promise of perpetual praise from the flock of God's pasture.

What Makes This Remarkable: Psalm 79 is the companion lament to Psalm 74, both attributed to Asaph and both responding to the destruction of the temple. But Psalm 79 focuses on the human cost — bodies, blood, shame — where Psalm 74 focused on the architectural destruction. The most haunting image is verse 3: blood poured out like water around Jerusalem, with no one to bury the dead. The denial of burial was the ultimate disgrace in the ancient world; it meant the person was erased from memory. The psalm's theology is built on the tension between Israel's acknowledged sin (verse 8-9) and God's obligation to His own name (verse 9-10). The argument is: we sinned, but Your reputation is at stake.

Translation Friction: The historical setting is almost certainly the Babylonian destruction of 586 BCE, though some elements could apply to other national catastrophes. The prayer for vengeance (verse 6, 10, 12) sits uncomfortably with later theological sensibilities, but it must be read in context: the psalmist is watching unburied bodies being eaten by animals and asking God to hold the perpetrators accountable. The 'sevenfold' return of reproach (verse 12) uses the language of proportional justice, not excessive revenge.

Connections: Psalm 79:1 is quoted in 1 Maccabees 7:17 in connection with the desecration under Alcimus. Verse 6 is nearly identical to Jeremiah 10:25, suggesting either literary dependence or a shared liturgical tradition. The unburied-bodies motif connects to Jeremiah 7:33 and 16:4. The 'sheep of Your pasture' (verse 13) echoes Psalms 74:1, 78:52, and 95:7. The plea 'do not remember against us former iniquities' (verse 8) anticipates the theology of Isaiah 43:25.

¹A psalm of Asaph.

O God, the nations have invaded Your inheritance;
they have defiled Your holy temple;
they have reduced Jerusalem to rubble.

²They have given the corpses of Your servants
as food to the birds of the sky,
the flesh of Your faithful ones
to the animals of the earth.

³They poured out their blood like water
around Jerusalem,
and there was no one to bury them.

⁴We have become a disgrace to our neighbors,
an object of mockery and ridicule to those around us.

⁵How long, O LORD? Will You be angry forever?
Will Your jealousy burn like fire?

⁶Pour out Your wrath on the nations
that do not know You,
and on the kingdoms
that do not call on Your name.

⁷and laid waste his dwelling place.
For they have devoured Jacob

⁸Do not remember against us the iniquities of the past;
let Your compassion come quickly to meet us,
for we are brought very low.

⁹Help us, O God of our salvation,
for the sake of the glory of Your name!
Deliver us and atone for our sins
for the sake of Your name.

¹⁰Why should the nations say, 'Where is their God?'
Let the avenging of Your servants' spilled blood
be known among the nations before our eyes.

¹¹Let the groaning of the prisoner come before You;
by the greatness of Your arm
preserve those condemned to die.

¹²Return sevenfold to our neighbors, into their laps,
the reproach with which they reproached You, O Lord.

¹³Then we, Your people, the sheep of Your pasture,
will give thanks to You forever;
from generation to generation
we will recount Your praise.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The word *yyim* ('ruins, rubble heaps') describes a city so thoroughly destroyed that it has been reduced to piles of stone. The same word appears in Micah 1:6 and Micah 3:12 for cities leveled by divine judgment.
2. The curse of having one's body left unburied for scavengers is one of the Deuteronomic covenant curses (Deuteronomy 28:26). The psalmist is experiencing what Moses warned about — but the victims are the *chasidim*, the faithful, not the wicked. This is the psalm's anguish: the covenant curses have fallen on the covenant-keepers.
3. This verse is quoted in 1 Maccabees 7:17 as a lament for the faithful killed under the Seleucid oppression, showing that the psalm was reused for later national catastrophes. The image of blood as water means it was spilled without value, without care, without consequence for the killers.
4. The *cherpah* ('disgrace, reproach'), *la'ag* ('mockery, scoffing'), and *qeles* ('ridicule, derision') describe the social dimension of the catastrophe. The neighbors (*shekhenim*) — Edom, Ammon, Moab, and others — mock the fallen city. The destruction is not only physical and spiritual but social: Israel has become a laughingstock.
5. The phrase *ad mah* ('how long?') echoes Psalm 74:10. The *qin'ah* ('jealousy, zeal') is God's passionate commitment to His own honor — it burns (*tiv'ar*) like *esh* ('fire') when that honor is violated. The question implies that God's anger seems directed at His own people rather than at the nations who destroyed them.
6. Jeremiah 10:25 contains this verse nearly verbatim, suggesting a shared liturgical tradition. The prayer is not for indiscriminate violence but for proportional justice: those who destroyed God's people should face God's wrath.
7. The verb *akhal* ('devoured, consumed') is the language of predation — the nations ate Jacob like an animal consumes prey. The *naveh* ('dwelling place, pasture, habitation') that has been laid waste (*heshamu*, 'made desolate') connects to the shepherd imagery — the flock's pasture has been destroyed.
8. The acknowledgment of sin distinguishes this psalm from Psalm 44, which protests innocence. Here the psalmist admits guilt but argues that the punishment exceeds the crime — and that God's compassion should override God's justice.
9. The appeal to God's name (*shem*) as motivation for action is a Moses-style argument (cf. Exodus 32:12, Numbers 14:13-16). If God destroys His people, the nations will mock God's power. God's reputation among the nations depends on Israel's survival.
10. The taunt *ayyeh Eloheihem* ('where is their God?') is the most offensive question possible — it challenges God's existence, His power, or His care. The psalmist wants *niqmat dam avadekha* ('the vengeance of the blood of Your servants') to be visible *le-eineinu* ('before our eyes') — not hidden or delayed but publicly, demonstrably enacted.
11. The *enqat asir* ('groaning of the prisoner') represents the exiles in Babylon. The phrase *benei temutah* ('children of death, those condemned to death') describes people already sentenced. The *zero'a* ('arm') of God — His intervening power — is the only force that can reverse a death sentence.
12. The *shiv'atayim* ('sevenfold') is the language of proportional justice (cf. Genesis 4:15, Proverbs 6:31). The *cherpah* ('reproach') is returned *el cheiqam* ('into their bosom/lap') — the pocket formed by the fold of a garment, the place where one receives payment. The neighbors who mocked God's people mocked God Himself; the return will come back to them personally.
13. The psalm that began with death and desecration ends with a pledge of eternal gratitude. The pivot from lament to praise is not yet complete — it depends on God's response — but the psalmist makes the promise in advance: if You act, we will never stop thanking You.

80

Summary: *A communal lament that addresses God as the Shepherd of Israel enthroned on the cherubim. The psalm calls upon God to shine forth, to stir up His might, and to come and save. Its structure is built around a threefold refrain — 'Restore us, O God; let Your face shine, that we may be saved' — which appears in verses 4, 8, and 20, each time with an escalating divine title. The central section (verses 9-17) develops an extended vine allegory: God transplanted a vine from Egypt, cleared the ground, and let it grow until it covered the mountains and shaded the cedars. But then He broke down its walls, and every passerby plucks it. The psalm pleads for God to look down from heaven, tend the vine He planted, and restore the man at His right hand.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The vine allegory is one of the most sustained metaphors in the Psalter. Beginning with the transplanting from Egypt (the Exodus), the vine's growth traces Israel's history through the conquest and the Davidic-Solomonic expansion, when Israel's influence stretched from the Mediterranean Sea to the Euphrates River. The vine grew to cover mountains and shade great cedars — an image of astonishing abundance. Then the reversal: God Himself broke down the walls. The devastation is not blamed on the vine's weakness or on the strength of the enemies but on God's decision to remove the protection. This makes the plea more urgent: if You broke the wall, only You can rebuild it. The threefold refrain with escalating titles — 'O God' (verse 4), 'O God of hosts' (verse 8), 'O LORD God of hosts' (verse 20) — creates a crescendo of increasingly desperate address.*

Translation Friction: *The psalm mentions Joseph, Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh (verses 2-3) — all northern tribes — which has led many scholars to associate this psalm with the fall of the northern kingdom to Assyria in 722 BCE. However, the vine imagery in verses 9-12 encompasses all Israel, and the plea for the 'man at Your right hand' (verse 18) may refer to the Davidic king. The psalm may therefore be a plea from the combined people, possibly written in Judah after 722 but concerned with the fate of the northern tribes. The phrase ben adam ('son of man') in verse 18 is debated: does it refer to the king, the nation personified, or a future messianic figure?*

Connections: *The vine allegory connects to Isaiah 5:1-7 (the Song of the Vineyard), Ezekiel 15 and 17, and Jesus' parable of the wicked tenants (Mark 12:1-12) and His declaration 'I am the vine' (John 15:1-8). The shepherd imagery echoes Psalms 23, 77:21, 78:52, and Ezekiel 34. The phrase 'Shepherd of Israel' connects to Genesis 49:24, where God is called 'the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel.' The cherubim throne connects to the ark of the covenant (Exodus 25:18-22, 1 Samuel 4:4, 2 Samuel 6:2).*

¹For the director of music. To 'Lilies of Testimony.' A psalm of Asaph.

²O Shepherd of Israel, hear us!
You who lead Joseph like a flock,
You who are enthroned on the cherubim — shine forth!

³Before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh,
stir up Your might
and come to save us!

⁴Restore us, O God;
let Your face shine, that we may be saved.

⁵O LORD God of hosts,
how long will You smolder against Your people's prayer?

⁶You have fed them the bread of tears
and made them drink tears by the measure.

⁷You have made us an object of strife to our neighbors,
and our enemies mock us.

⁸Restore us, O God of hosts;
let Your face shine, that we may be saved.

⁹You uprooted a vine from Egypt;
You drove out nations and planted it.

¹⁰You cleared the ground before it;
it took deep root and filled the land.

¹¹The mountains were covered with its shade,
and its branches were like the cedars of God.

¹²It sent out its branches to the Sea
and its shoots to the River.

¹³Why have You broken down its walls,
so that all who pass along the road pluck its fruit?

¹⁴The boar from the forest ravages it,
and the creatures of the field feed on it.

¹⁵O God of hosts, turn back!
Look down from heaven and see;
tend this vine!

¹⁶Protect what Your right hand has planted,
the shoot You have strengthened for Yourself.

¹⁷It is burned with fire, cut down;
at the rebuke of Your face they perish.

¹⁸Let Your hand be upon the man at Your right hand,
upon the son of man whom You strengthened for Yourself.

¹⁹Then we will not turn back from You;
revive us, and we will call on Your name.

²⁰Restore us, O LORD God of hosts;
let Your face shine, that we may be saved.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The phrase *el shoshannim edut* ('to the lilies of testimony') likely indicates a tune or musical setting. *Shoshannim* ('lilies') appears in the superscriptions of Psalms 45, 60, 69, and 80, possibly referring to a melody by that name. The addition of *edut* ('testimony, witness') distinguishes this setting from the others.
2. The phrase *yoshev hakkeruvim* ('enthroned on the cherubim') appears in 1 Samuel 4:4, 2 Samuel 6:2, and Isaiah 37:16. It is the most precise liturgical description of God's throne location — between the wings of the two cherubim that crowned the ark of the covenant.
3. The specific mention of Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh (the Rachel tribes) rather than Judah has led many scholars to read this as a northern psalm, possibly composed after the Assyrian destruction of the northern kingdom in 722 BCE. Benjamin, located between north and south, could represent the border territory caught between the two kingdoms.

4. The refrain appears three times with escalating divine names: Elohim (verse 4), Elohim Tseva'ot (verse 8), YHWH Elohim Tseva'ot (verse 20). Each repetition adds weight to the address, as if the psalmist is trying progressively more powerful names to get God's attention.
5. The verb *ashan* ('to smoke') is the same used in Psalm 74:1 for God's anger smoking against His flock. The image is of a God whose wrath is so intense that the prayers offered by His people are received with hostility rather than grace.
6. The image of eating and drinking tears inverts the provision narrative of Psalm 78:23-25, where God opened heaven's doors and rained down bread. The same God who fed the people with grain from heaven now feeds them with the bread of affliction.
7. The word *madon* ('strife, contention, quarrel') means the neighbors fight over Israel — not in defense but in derision. The mockery (*yil'agu*, from *la'ag*, 'to mock, to scoff') echoes Psalm 79:4. Israel has become entertainment for the surrounding nations.
8. The second refrain, now with Elohim Tseva'ot ('God of hosts/armies') — a step up from the simple Elohim of verse 4. The psalmist is invoking God's military power: the God who commands angelic armies.
9. The vine as metaphor for Israel appears in Isaiah 5:1-7 (the most extensive version), Jeremiah 2:21, Ezekiel 15:1-8, and Hosea 10:1. It is one of the most common metaphors for the covenant people in the prophetic tradition.
10. The verb *pinnita* ('You cleared') means God prepared the soil — He removed obstacles so the vine could thrive. The phrase *vattashresh shorasheiha* ('and it rooted its roots') describes deep establishment. The result: *vattemalle erets* ('it filled the land'). The vine spread across the entire territory — the land of Canaan became fully Israelite.
11. The phrase *arzei El* ('cedars of God') uses the divine name as a superlative — 'mighty cedars, cedars of extraordinary size.' The same construction appears in Psalm 36:7 (*hare El*, 'mountains of God') and Psalm 68:16 (*har Elohim*, 'mountain of God'). God's name marks the superlative.
12. The territorial extent described here matches the idealized borders of Solomon's kingdom (1 Kings 4:21, 24). The vine allegory reads Israel's history as a growth narrative that peaked under David and Solomon.
13. Isaiah 5:5 uses nearly identical language: 'I will remove its hedge... I will break down its wall.' The parallel confirms that the removal of divine protection is understood as a deliberate act of God, not an accident or an enemy's achievement.
14. In the Masoretic text, the word *ya'ar* ('forest') has a suspended letter *ayin*, one of only a handful of such scribal marks in the Hebrew Bible. This may mark the midpoint of the Psalter by letter count, or it may preserve a textual variant.
15. The verb *paqad* ('to visit, to attend to') can mean either to bless or to punish, depending on context. Here it means 'to take care of, to restore' — the vine needs the gardener's attention, not His absence.
16. The word *khannah* ('stock, root, vineyard plot') refers to the planted area. The phrase *asher nat'ah yeminekha* ('that Your right hand planted') attributes the vine's existence to God's own direct action. The *ben* ('son, shoot, branch') that God *immatsettah lakh* ('strengthened for Yourself') may be a double reference: the vine's strongest branch (the Davidic dynasty) and/or the nation itself as God's 'son' (cf. Exodus 4:22, 'Israel is My firstborn son').
17. The vine that once covered mountains is now *serufah va-esh* ('burned with fire') and *khesukhah* ('cut down, pruned to the stump'). The phrase *migga'arat panekha* ('from the rebuke of Your face') attributes even the burning and cutting to God's own action — His face that was asked to shine (verse 4) has instead rebuked. The same face that could save is the face that destroys.
18. The phrase *ben adam* ('son of man') here is not the apocalyptic 'Son of Man' of Daniel 7:13, but it contributes to the larger biblical tradition of the term. In this psalm, it refers to the human leader whom God chose and empowered — the Davidic king as representative of the people.
19. The promise 'we will not turn back' responds to the accusation of Psalm 78:57 ('they turned back and were faithless'). The psalmist pledges that the restored people will not repeat the pattern of the ancestors.
20. The three-part refrain structure (verses 4, 8, 20) creates the psalm's emotional architecture: the same words repeated with increasing intensity. The refrain is not merely decorative but performative — it enacts the community's desperate, repeated crying out. The third repetition, with the fullest divine name, is the psalm's final, most concentrated appeal.

81

Summary: *A festival psalm attributed to Asaph that opens with exuberant summons to praise — shout, sing, blow the ram's horn — then pivots sharply as God's own voice breaks in. The divine speech dominates the psalm from verse 6 onward, recounting the exodus deliverance, the testing at Meribah, and the first commandment's demand for exclusive loyalty. God laments Israel's refusal to listen, describes what He did in response (handing them over to their own stubborn hearts), and closes with a devastating conditional: if only My people would listen, I would feed them with the finest wheat and honey from the rock.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The structural pivot at verse 6 is one of the most dramatic in the Psalter. What begins as a congregational hymn suddenly becomes a divine oracle. God speaks in first person — 'I relieved his shoulder of the burden' — and the worshippers become an audience to their own history retold by the one who shaped it. The closing conditional (lu ammi shomea li, 'if only My people would listen to Me') is among the most poignant lines God speaks in the Hebrew Bible. It reveals divine longing — God as the rejected lover who still extends the offer. The psalm's movement from celebration to divine lament mirrors the trajectory of Israel's own story: from deliverance to disobedience.*

Translation Friction: *The superscription assigns this to Asaph, which places it within the Asaphite collection (Psalms 73-83). The reference to Joseph in verse 6 (edut bi-Yehoseph) is unusual — most psalms use Jacob or Israel. The use of Joseph may signal northern tribal identity or invoke the exodus generation specifically. The phrase 'I tested you at the waters of Meribah' (v. 8) echoes Exodus 17 and Numbers 20, but the Hebrew selah at verse 8 makes the exact division of the divine speech debated among commentators.*

Connections: *The call to blow the shofar at the new moon and full moon (v. 4) connects to the festival calendar of Leviticus 23. The divine speech recounting exodus deliverance parallels Psalm 95:7-11, which similarly moves from praise to divine warning about hardened hearts. The closing image of honey from the rock (v. 17) echoes Deuteronomy 32:13, where God feeds Israel honey from the crag and oil from flinty rock. The 'I am the LORD your God who brought you up out of Egypt' formula (v. 11) quotes the Decalogue preamble (Exodus 20:2) verbatim.*

¹For the choirmaster. On the Gittith. Of Asaph.

²Shout for joy to God our strength!

Raise a shout to the God of Jacob!

³Lift up a song and strike the tambourine,
the sweet-sounding lyre with the harp!

⁴Blow the ram's horn at the new moon,
at the full moon, on the day of our feast!

⁵For it is a statute for Israel,
a ruling from the God of Jacob.

⁶He established it as a testimony in Joseph
when he went out against the land of Egypt.
I heard a language I did not know:

⁷I relieved his shoulder of the burden;
his hands were freed from the basket.

⁸In distress you called and I rescued you.
I answered you from the hidden place of thunder.
I tested you at the waters of Meribah. Selah.

⁹Listen, My people, and I will warn you.
O Israel, if only you would listen to Me!

¹⁰There must be no foreign god among you.
You must not bow down to an alien god.

¹¹I am the LORD your God
who brought you up from the land of Egypt.
Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.

¹²But My people did not listen to My voice,
and Israel would have none of Me.

¹³So I let them go in the stubbornness of their hearts;
they walked by their own plans.

¹⁴If only My people would listen to Me,
if Israel would walk in My ways!

¹⁵How quickly I would subdue their enemies
and turn My hand against their foes!

¹⁶Those who hate the LORD would cringe before Him,
and their doom would last forever.

¹⁷He would feed him with the finest wheat,
and from the rock I would satisfy you with honey.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The term gittit is of uncertain meaning — possibly a musical instrument from Gath, a winepress melody (from gat, 'winepress'), or a tune associated with the grape harvest. Its appearance in Psalms 8, 81, and 84 may link these psalms to autumn festival celebrations. The Asaph attribution places this psalm within the Levitical guild of temple musicians established by David (1 Chronicles 16:4-5).
2. The verb harninu ('shout, cry out in joy') and hariu ('raise a shout, sound a blast') are both high-volume, communal actions — this is not private meditation but public, full-throated worship. The designation 'God of Jacob' rather than 'God of Israel' may preserve an older tribal designation or emphasize the patriarch's personal story of wrestling and transformation.
3. The verb se'u ('lift up, carry') paired with zimrah ('song, melody') creates the image of physically raising music like an offering. The tof ('tambourine, hand drum'), kinnor ('lyre'), and nevel ('harp') form the standard ensemble of temple worship. The kinnor was David's instrument (1 Samuel 16:23); the nevel was a larger, deeper-toned stringed instrument.
4. The word keseh (or kese) means 'full moon' or 'the covering/concealment' — most likely the full moon when the moon is fully 'covered' with light. The pairing of chodesh ('new moon') with keseh ('full moon') spans the entire lunar cycle. The feast in view is almost certainly Sukkot (Tabernacles), which begins at the full moon of the seventh month (Tishrei), preceded by the shofar blast of Rosh Hashanah at the new moon.
5. The word choq ('statute, decree, something inscribed') and mishpat ('ruling, judgment, ordinance') together convey that this festival observance is not optional tradition but divinely mandated law. The God of Jacob did not suggest celebration — He commanded it.
6. The use of Joseph for Israel is rare — it appears also in Psalms 77:16, 78:67, and 80:2. In each case the context involves the exodus or the northern tribes. The shift from 'he' to 'I' in this verse marks the beginning of the divine oracle that dominates the rest of the psalm.
7. The word dud can mean 'pot, cauldron, or basket.' In the context of Egyptian slavery, it most likely refers to the baskets used to carry clay or bricks (cf. Exodus 1:14, where Israel's labor involves mortar and brick). Some translations render it 'pots' following KJV, but 'basket' better fits the construction imagery of the Egyptian bondage.
8. Meribah (from riv, 'to contend, to quarrel') is the place where Israel quarreled with God over the lack of water. The name itself means 'Quarreling' or 'Contention.' God's statement that He tested Israel there reverses the perspective of Exodus 17:7, where the people tested God. Both testings happened simultaneously: Israel tested God's patience while God tested Israel's trust.

9. The construction *shema...im tishma* ('hear...if you would hear') uses the same verb twice, creating an envelope: the command to listen frames the condition of listening. It echoes the Shema of Deuteronomy 6:4, where hearing is the foundational act of covenant fidelity.
10. The phrase *el zar* ('foreign god') and *el nekhar* ('alien god') form a synonymous parallel that echoes the first commandment (Exodus 20:3). The word *zar* means 'strange, foreign, unauthorized' and *nekhar* means 'alien, unrecognized, from outside.' Together they describe any deity that is not the LORD — not merely foreign in origin but unauthorized in identity. God is quoting the Decalogue's opening demand back to His people.
11. The phrase *harchev pikha* ('open your mouth wide') uses the Hiphil of *rachav* ('to be wide, spacious'). It means to open as wide as possible — to hold nothing back in asking, to receive with full capacity. The promise *va'amal'ehu* ('and I will fill it') is unconditional in its grammar: God does not say 'I might fill it.' The only condition is the opening.
12. The verb *avah* ('to be willing, to consent') is a word of volition, not capacity. Israel's refusal was not inability to hear but unwillingness to respond. The phrase *lo avah li* ('would not consent to Me') personalizes the rejection: it is not God's law that Israel rejected but God Himself.
13. The verb *shillach* ('to send away, to let go, to release') in the Piel is the same verb used for Pharaoh releasing Israel from Egypt. The irony is pointed: God once sent Israel out of bondage; now He sends them into the bondage of their own desires. Freedom from God becomes the worst captivity.
14. The particle *lu* introduces a counterfactual wish — something desired but not actualized. This is one of the most emotionally revealing statements God makes in the Psalter. It places divine omnipotence alongside divine longing, suggesting that God's power does not override human freedom even when that freedom causes God grief.
15. The word *kim'at* ('how little, how quickly, almost') emphasizes the ease and speed with which God would act — the obstacles Israel faces are trivial from God's perspective. The verb *akhnia* ('I would subdue, I would bring low') is the Hiphil of *kana*, meaning to force into submission. The phrase *ashiv yadi* ('I would turn My hand') means to redirect divine power against Israel's oppressors. The conditional remains in force: all of this would happen if Israel would listen.
16. The verb *yekhachashu* ('would cringe, would feign submission') from *kachash* means to cower, to submit falsely, to cringe in fear. The enemies would not genuinely repent — they would simply be crushed into submission. The phrase *ittam le-olam* ('their time forever') is ambiguous: it may mean Israel's time of prosperity would last forever, or that the enemies' time of punishment would be permanent. Most interpreters take it as Israel's blessing enduring.
17. The shift from third to second person (from 'him' to 'you') within a single verse is characteristic of prophetic speech, where God moves freely between describing Israel and addressing Israel. The honey from the rock echoes Deuteronomy 32:13. Wild bees nested in rock crevices in ancient Palestine, making 'honey from the rock' both a literal reality and a metaphor for provision from impossible sources.

82

Summary: *God stands in the divine council and pronounces judgment on the elohim — the gods, the divine beings — who were charged with governing the nations justly but have instead perverted justice, shown partiality to the wicked, and allowed the foundations of the earth to shake. God indicts them, strips them of their immortality, and sentences them to die like mortals. The psalm closes with a petition for God to rise and judge the earth Himself, since all nations belong to Him.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This is the most theologically explosive psalm in the Psalter. The word elohim appears three times with three different referents: God (Elohim) stands in the council of God (El), He judges among the gods (elohim). The psalm presupposes a worldview in which the Most High God delegated governance of the nations to subordinate divine beings — a concept rooted in Deuteronomy 32:8-9, where God divided humanity according to the number of the bene elohim ('sons of God') but kept Israel for Himself. These beings have failed in their charge: they tolerate injustice, ignore the vulnerable, and let the wicked prosper. God's response is not reform but execution: 'You will die like humans.' The psalm effectively narrates the demotion of the gods — a monotheistic text that acknowledges the existence of other divine beings precisely to declare their judgment and death.*

Translation Friction: *The identity of the elohim in this psalm has been debated for millennia. Three main readings exist: (1) they are divine beings, members of the heavenly council, to whom God delegated national governance — this is the most natural reading of the Hebrew and aligns with Deuteronomy 32:8-9 and the broader ancient Near Eastern concept of a divine assembly; (2) they are human judges who bear the title elohim because they exercise divine authority (this reading influenced later rabbinic interpretation and is reflected in Jesus's citation of verse 6 in John 10:34); (3) they are the gods of the nations, now declared impotent. The Covenant Rendering follows reading (1) as the most consistent with the Hebrew text and its ancient Near*

Eastern context, while noting that the text itself may intentionally blur the boundary between divine and human authority.

Connections: The divine council scene echoes Job 1-2, 1 Kings 22:19-23, Isaiah 6, and Daniel 7:9-10. Deuteronomy 32:8-9 (reading bene elohim with the Dead Sea Scrolls rather than bene Yisra'el with the Masoretic Text) provides the theological backdrop: God assigned nations to divine beings but kept Israel. Jesus quotes verse 6 in John 10:34-36, using the psalm's logic in His own defense. The accusation that the elohim failed to protect the poor and orphaned echoes the prophetic indictments of Isaiah 1:17, 10:1-2, and Amos 5:11-12 — except here the defendants are not human kings but heavenly powers.

¹A psalm of Asaph.

God stands in the divine council;
among the gods He renders judgment:

²How long will you judge unjustly
and show favor to the wicked? Selah.

³Defend the weak and the fatherless;
uphold the rights of the afflicted and destitute.

⁴Rescue the weak and the needy;
deliver them from the hand of the wicked.

⁵They do not know, they do not understand;
they walk about in darkness.
All the foundations of the earth are shaken.

⁶I Myself declared, 'You are gods,
and sons of the Most High, all of you.'

⁷Yet you will die like humans,
and fall like any prince.

⁸Rise up, O God! Judge the earth,
for You possess all the nations as Your inheritance.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The three uses of elohim/El in this verse are the interpretive crux of the entire psalm. The first elohim is the God of Israel — the supreme deity. The adat El ('assembly of El') refers to the divine council. The second elohim refers to the other divine beings in the council. This is not polytheism — it is hierarchical monotheism: one supreme God who holds authority over subordinate divine beings. The Dead Sea Scrolls and Ugaritic texts confirm that this council imagery was widespread in ancient Israelite and Canaanite religion.
2. The phrase nasa panim ('lift the face') is a legal idiom meaning to show partiality, to accept a bribe, to rule in someone's favor regardless of merit. When God 'lifts His face' to someone (Numbers 6:26), it is grace; when a judge lifts the face of the wicked, it is corruption. The selah at the end may mark a pause for the weight of the accusation to settle.
3. Four terms describe the vulnerable: dal ('weak, poor, low'), yatom ('fatherless, orphan'), ani ('afflicted, humble, oppressed'), and rash ('destitute, impoverished'). The fourfold description covers every category of powerlessness. The verb hatsdiku ('vindicate, declare righteous, uphold the rights of') is from tsadaq — the gods are told to exercise tsedaqah ('righteousness') on behalf of those who cannot secure it for themselves. This is the job description the gods have failed.
4. Two verbs of rescue: palletu ('rescue, cause to escape') and hatsilu ('deliver, snatch away'). The second — from natsal — is the same verb used for God's rescue of Israel from Egypt. The gods are expected to perform for the vulnerable what God performed for Israel. The phrase mi-yad resha'im ('from the hand of the wicked') means from the grip, the power, the control of those who oppress. The hand is the instrument of power, and the wicked have used theirs to crush the poor.

5. The verb *yimmotu* (from *mot*, 'to totter, to shake, to be moved') is used elsewhere for mountains trembling and thrones being shaken. When applied to *mosdei arets* ('foundations of the earth'), it describes cosmic destabilization. The connection between divine injustice and cosmic chaos reflects the ancient Near Eastern understanding that justice and creation are linked: when the gods fail, reality fractures.
6. Jesus quotes this verse in John 10:34-36, arguing that if Scripture calls these beings 'gods,' then His own claim to divine sonship is not blasphemy. The argument turns on the psalm's own logic: if God Himself conferred the title *elohim* on beings who subsequently failed, then the title itself does not guarantee righteousness. Jesus's use of this text is one of the most debated christological arguments in the New Testament.
7. The phrase *ke-adam* ('like a human, like Adam') carries both meanings simultaneously. They will die like any mortal human, and they will fall like Adam fell — from a position of divine favor into mortality. The word *tippolu* ('you will fall') echoes the language of fallen kings in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28, where human rulers who claimed divine status are brought down to Sheol.
8. The verb *tinchal* ('You will inherit, You will take possession') in the context of Deuteronomy 32:8-9 is revolutionary. In the older arrangement, God took Israel as His *nachalah* ('inheritance') and assigned the other nations to subordinate beings. Now the psalmist demands that God inherit all nations — a universalizing move that collapses the distinction between Israel's God and the gods of the nations. This verse anticipates the fully monotheistic vision of Isaiah 45:22: 'Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth.'

83

Summary: *The final psalm of the Asaphite collection is a communal lament against a coalition of nations conspiring to annihilate Israel. The psalmist names ten enemy peoples — Edom, the Ishmaelites, Moab, the Hagrites, Gebal, Ammon, Amalek, Philistia, Tyre, and Assyria — who have united with one purpose: to wipe out the name of Israel. The psalmist calls on God to break His silence and to do to these enemies what He did to Midian, Sisera, Jabin, and the kings Oreb, Zeeb, Zebah, and Zalmunna. The final petition is that God would pursue them like fire consuming a forest, so that the nations would know that YHWH alone is the Most High over all the earth.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The coalition described in this psalm has no exact historical parallel — no single moment in Israelite history saw all ten of these nations allied simultaneously. This has led many scholars to see the psalm as either a composite of multiple threats or an idealized picture of total encirclement. The ten nations form a geographic noose around Israel: Edom and Moab to the east, Philistia to the west, Tyre to the north, Amalek to the south, Assyria as the distant imperial power. The psalm's military geography is also theological geography — Israel is surrounded on all sides, and only God's intervention can break the siege. The concluding purpose clause is remarkable: the goal of God's wrath is not annihilation but recognition. The psalmist wants the nations to know that YHWH is the Most High.*

Translation Friction: *The violence of the imprecations — fire, storm, shame, eternal disgrace — raises difficult questions about the ethics of prayer. The psalmist is not asking God to convert the nations but to destroy them, or at minimum to humiliate them so thoroughly that they acknowledge YHWH's supremacy. Yet the final verse introduces a surprising note: the purpose of divine action is that the nations 'may know that You alone, whose name is the LORD, are the Most High over all the earth.' This is not pure vengeance — it is evangelism by catastrophe, a violent form of the missionary impulse.*

Connections: *The historical references draw from Judges 4-8: Sisera and Jabin were defeated by Deborah and Barak (Judges 4-5); Oreb and Zeeb were Midianite captains killed by the Ephraimites (Judges 7:25); Zebah and Zalmunna were Midianite kings executed by Gideon (Judges 8:21). The ten-nation coalition echoes the Table of Nations pattern and the enemies list of Genesis 15:19-21. The closing verse's declaration that YHWH is Elyon ('Most High') over all the earth connects directly to Psalm 82:6, where the sons of Elyon are judged — now the psalm asks Elyon to act on His own authority.*

¹A song. A psalm of Asaph.

²O God, do not keep silent!
Do not hold Your peace;
do not be still, O God!

³For look — Your enemies are in uproar,
and those who hate You have raised their heads.

⁴Against Your people they devise cunning plans;
they conspire against Your treasured ones.

⁵They say, 'Come, let us wipe them out as a nation,
so that the name of Israel will be remembered no more.'

⁶For they conspire with one mind;
against You they seal a covenant —

⁷the tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites,
Moab and the Hagrites,

⁸Gebal, Ammon, and Amalek,
Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre.

⁹Even Assyria has joined them;
they lend their arm to the children of Lot. Selah.

¹⁰Do to them as You did to Midian,
as to Sisera, as to Jabin at the Wadi Kishon —

¹¹They were destroyed at En-dor;
they became dung for the ground.

¹²Make their nobles like Oreb and Zeeb,
all their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna —

¹³who said, 'Let us seize for ourselves
the pastures of God.'

¹⁴O my God, make them like whirling dust,
like chaff before the wind.

¹⁵As fire consumes the forest,
as flame sets the mountains ablaze —

¹⁶So pursue them with Your storm
and terrify them with Your tempest.

¹⁷Fill their faces with shame —
so that they may seek Your name, O LORD.

¹⁸Let them be ashamed and terrified forever;
let them be disgraced and perish —

¹⁹Let them know that You alone —
whose name is the LORD —
are the Most High over all the earth.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. This is the last psalm in the Asaphite collection (Psalms 73-83). The double designation *shir mizmor* ('song, psalm') may indicate both vocal and instrumental performance. The Asaph collection ends with this psalm of national crisis, forming an *inclusio* with Psalm 73's meditation on theodicy — the collection opens with the problem of the wicked prospering and closes with the nations conspiring against God's people.
2. The verb *charash* can mean both 'to be silent' and 'to be deaf' — the psalmist may be accusing God of both: refusing to speak and refusing to hear. The three verbs together paint a picture of total divine disengagement that the psalmist finds intolerable in the face of existential threat.
3. The verb *yehemayun* ('they are in uproar, they roar') from *hamah* describes the noise of a seething crowd or a raging sea. The phrase *nas'u rosh* ('they have lifted the head') means they have grown bold, arrogant, defiant — the head lifted in open challenge rather than bowed in submission. The psalmist frames the enemies as God's enemies, not merely Israel's — an important theological move that makes Israel's defense God's own cause.
4. The verb *ya'arimu* ('they make crafty, they devise shrewdly') from *aram* describes deliberate, calculated scheming. The word *tsefunekha* ('Your hidden ones, Your treasured ones') from *tsafan* ('to hide, to treasure up, to protect') may mean those whom God has hidden under His protection, or those He has treasured and stored up — His precious possession. The enemies' conspiracy targets not just a political entity but God's personal treasure.
5. The phrase *shem Yisra'el* ('the name of Israel') carries enormous theological weight. Israel's name was given by God Himself in the wrestling at Peniel (Genesis 32:28). To erase Israel's name is to erase God's naming act — it is an assault not just on a people but on a divine decision. This is why the psalmist frames the threat as an attack on God Himself.
6. The phrase *no'atsu lev yachdav* ('they conspire with one heart together') describes unanimous, wholehearted conspiracy. The word *berit* ('covenant') is the most loaded term in Israelite theology — the nations are making a covenant against the God of covenants. The verb *yikrothu* ('they cut') is the technical term for covenant-making (*karat berit*, 'to cut a covenant'). The enemies have formalized their alliance with the same solemn ritual that binds God to Israel.
7. The catalog of enemies begins with Israel's closest kin: Edom (descended from Esau, Jacob's twin), the Ishmaelites (descended from Abraham's first son), Moab (descended from Lot, Abraham's nephew), and the Hagrites (associated with Hagar, mother of Ishmael). Every enemy named is a relative. The word *ohalei* ('tents of') designates nomadic or semi-nomadic peoples — tent-dwellers encamped against Israel.
8. Gebal (a Phoenician city, modern Byblos in Lebanon, or possibly an Edomite region south of the Dead Sea), Ammon (east of the Jordan, descended from Lot), Amalek (the perennial enemy from the southern desert — the first nation to attack Israel after the exodus, Exodus 17:8-16), Philistia (the coastal power to the west), and Tyre (the great Phoenician maritime city to the north). The geographic encirclement is complete: enemies from every direction.
9. The 'children of Lot' (*benei Lot*) refers to Moab and Ammon, both descended from Lot's incestuous union with his daughters (Genesis 19:30-38). Assyria's role as the 'arm' of Lot's descendants is ironic — the mighty empire serves the interests of nations born from disgrace. The *selah* here marks the end of the enemy catalog and the transition to the imprecatory petition.
10. The prayer now invokes precedent: God's past victories become the model for present deliverance. Midian was defeated by Gideon's three hundred (Judges 7). Sisera was the Canaanite general killed by Jael with a tent peg (Judges 4:21). Jabin was the Canaanite king of Hazor whom Deborah and Barak defeated at the Wadi Kishon (Judges 4-5). The psalmist is saying: You did this before. Do it again.
11. En-dor is not mentioned in the Judges account of Sisera's defeat, but it was near the Kishon valley where the battle took place. The phrase *hayu domen la-adamah* ('they became dung for the ground') is deliberately degrading — the mighty warriors decomposed into fertilizer. Their bodies nourished the soil they tried to conquer. The image strips all dignity from military death.
12. Oreb ('Raven') and Zeeb ('Wolf') were Midianite captains captured and killed by the Ephraimites (Judges 7:25). Zebah ('Sacrifice') and Zalmunna ('Shade Denied') were Midianite kings whom Gideon personally executed (Judges 8:21). The psalmist prays that the current enemies' leadership will meet the same fate — not just defeat but death for every leader who conspired against Israel.
13. The word *ne'ot* ('pastures, meadows, dwelling places') from *navah* ('to be pleasant, to dwell') refers to the land of Israel as God's own grazing land — the territory God chose as His dwelling place. The enemies' ambition is not merely territorial but theological: they want to possess what God possesses. The verb *nirshah* ('let us take possession') from *yarash* means to dispossess, to inherit by displacement. They want to evict God from His own land.
14. The word *galgal* can mean 'wheel' or 'whirling thing' — likely the dried, spherical tumbleweed (a thistle head) that the wind rolls across the landscape. Paired with *qash* ('chaff, stubble'), the image is of enemies so insubstantial that the wind carries them away. What seemed like a terrifying coalition is, from God's perspective, dry weeds waiting for a breeze.
15. The verbs *tiv'ar* ('burns, consumes') and *telahhet* ('sets ablaze, scorches') describe uncontrollable wildfire sweeping through forested mountain terrain. The escalation from chaff (v. 14) to forest fire (v. 15) intensifies the image: the enemies are not merely scattered but incinerated. The psalm moves from wind to fire, from displacement to destruction.
16. The words *sa'ar* ('storm, gale') and *sufah* ('tempest, whirlwind') are the vocabulary of theophany — God appearing in weather. The verb *tevahlem* ('terrify them, throw them into panic') from *bahal* describes the divine panic that God inflicts on enemies in holy war (cf. Exodus 14:24, where God threw the Egyptian army into confusion). The psalmist wants not just defeat but divine terror.

17. The tension between 'fill their faces with shame' and 'so that they seek Your name' reveals the psalm's complex theology of divine wrath. Shame is not the goal — seeking God is the goal. The shame is the instrument that breaks the nations' arrogance enough for them to look upward. This moderating note distinguishes this psalm from pure vengeance.
18. Four verbs of ruin: yevoshu ('be ashamed'), yibahalu ('be terrified'), yachperu ('be disgraced'), and yovedu ('perish'). The escalation moves from inner shame to public disgrace to final destruction. The phrase *adei ad* ('forever, to perpetuity') makes the judgment permanent. Yet 'perish' here (from *avad*) may mean 'perish as a threat' rather than physical annihilation — the context of verses 17 and 19 suggests the nations survive but in a transformed state.
19. The title Elyon ('Most High') connects this psalm directly to Psalm 82:6, where the gods were called 'sons of the Most High.' Those gods failed and were sentenced to death; now the psalmist calls for the Most High to act directly, without intermediaries. The phrase *al kol ha-arets* ('over all the earth') universalizes the claim: YHWH is not Israel's tribal deity but the sovereign of every nation.

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Summary: *A Korahite psalm of intense longing for God's dwelling place. The psalmist aches for the temple courts with physical desire — soul and flesh cry out for the living God. Even the sparrow and swallow have found nesting places near God's altars, and the psalmist envies them. The psalm pronounces blessings on those who dwell in God's house, those whose strength is in Him, and those who pass through the Valley of Baca (Weeping) on pilgrimage. It closes with the declaration that a single day in God's courts is better than a thousand elsewhere, and that God withholds no good thing from those who walk with integrity.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This psalm is one of the most emotionally transparent prayers in Scripture. The opening exclamation *mah yedidot* ('how lovely, how beloved') uses a word from the root *yadad* ('to love'), making the temple not merely beautiful but loved — an object of affection, not just admiration. The progression from longing (vv. 2-3) to envy of birds (v. 4) to beatitudes about pilgrims (vv. 5-8) to the temple gate (vv. 9-10) to theological declaration (vv. 11-13) maps the journey from desire to arrival to understanding. The psalmist does not merely want to be in the temple; the psalmist wants to be where God is. The temple is beloved because God is there.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase *baqah* ('Valley of Baca') in verse 7 is debated. Baca may mean 'weeping' (from *bakah*, 'to weep'), 'balsam trees' (which grow in arid valleys), or a specific geographic location on the pilgrimage route to Jerusalem. The ambiguity may be intentional: the pilgrims pass through a valley of tears and transform it into a place of springs. The superscription assigns the psalm to the sons of Korah — Levitical musicians who had special access to the temple but may also have experienced periods of exclusion (the Korah rebellion of Numbers 16 cast a long shadow on the family).*

Connections: *The longing for God's courts echoes Psalm 27:4 ('One thing I have asked of the LORD — to dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life'). The bird imagery connects to Psalm 102:7 and Jesus's reference to sparrows in Matthew 10:29-31. The phrase 'sun and shield' in verse 12 is unique in the Psalter — God as sun appears also in Malachi 4:2 ('the sun of righteousness'). The Korahite collection (Psalms 42-49, 84-85, 87-88) consistently explores the theme of longing for God's presence, making this psalm the collection's emotional apex.*

¹For the choirmaster. On the Gittith. Of the sons of Korah. A psalm.

²How lovely are Your dwelling places,
O LORD of Hosts!

³My soul longs — it even faints —
for the courts of the LORD.
My heart and my flesh cry out
to the living God.

⁴Even the sparrow finds a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself
where she lays her young —

beside Your altars, O LORD of Hosts,
my King and my God.

⁵Blessed are those who dwell in Your house;
they are always praising You. Selah.

⁶Blessed is the person whose strength is in You,
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.

⁷Passing through the Valley of Weeping,
they make it a place of springs;
the early rain clothes it with blessings.

⁸They go from strength to strength;
each one appears before God in Zion.

⁹Give ear, O God of Jacob. Selah.
O LORD God of Hosts, hear my prayer;

¹⁰Look upon our shield, O God,
and gaze on the face of Your anointed one.

¹¹For a single day in Your courts is better than a thousand.
I would rather stand at the threshold of my God's house
than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

¹²For the LORD God is a sun and a shield;
the LORD gives grace and glory.
No good thing does He withhold
from those who walk with integrity.

¹³O LORD of Hosts,
blessed is the one who trusts in You.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The Gittith also appears in the superscription of Psalms 8 and 81. The sons of Korah were a Levitical guild of temple musicians — descendants of the Korah who rebelled against Moses (Numbers 16) but whose sons were spared (Numbers 26:11). Their survival despite their ancestor's judgment may explain the intense gratitude for access to God's presence that marks their psalms.
2. The word *mishkan* ('dwelling place, tabernacle') is the same word used for the wilderness tabernacle (Exodus 25:9). By using this term rather than *bayit* ('house') or *heikhal* ('temple'), the psalmist may be evoking the entire history of God's dwelling among His people — from the portable tent in the desert to the stone temple in Jerusalem.
3. The phrase *El chai* ('living God') appears also in Joshua 3:10, 1 Samuel 17:26, and Psalm 42:3 (another Korahite psalm). The title distinguishes the God of Israel from the dead idols of the nations — this God is alive, active, present, and that aliveness is what the psalmist's body aches for. The physical language (flesh, heart, fainting) insists that longing for God is not merely spiritual but somatic.
4. The grammar of this verse is debated. Some read 'beside Your altars' as the location of the nests (birds literally nesting in the altar structure). Others read it as the destination of the psalmist's longing, with the bird imagery as a separate observation. The first reading is more poignant: even the birds have what I cannot have — a permanent place near God's altars.
5. The Levites and priests who served in the temple had residential quarters within the temple complex. Their 'dwelling' was literal, not merely spiritual. The psalmist's beatitude reveals the social dimension of the longing: some people get to live where the psalmist can only pilgrimage.
6. The word *mesillot* ('highways') is the same word used in Isaiah 40:3 ('Prepare the highway of the LORD in the wilderness'). The internal highway is the spiritual counterpart of the physical road — both lead to God's presence. This verse influenced later Jewish and Christian interpretations of

pilgrimage as both physical journey and spiritual state.

7. The Valley of Baca is not identified with certainty. If from *bakah* ('to weep'), it is a valley of tears that pilgrims must cross. If from *baka* ('balsam tree'), it is an arid valley where only drought-resistant trees grow. Either reading produces the same theological point: the path to God passes through desolation, and the journey itself transforms the landscape.
8. The phrase *me-chayil el chayil* ('from strength to strength') describes pilgrims who grow stronger as they travel — the opposite of what physical exertion should produce. The nearer they get to God's house, the more energy they have. The verb *yera'eh* ('appears') is a Niphal form meaning 'is seen' — the pilgrim appears before God, is seen by God. The pilgrimage ends in mutual seeing: the pilgrim sees God's dwelling, and God sees the pilgrim.
9. The address combines three divine titles: YHWH (the personal covenant name), Elohim (the generic divine title), and Tsevaot (Lord of Hosts). The parallel adds *Elohei Ya'aqov* ('God of Jacob'), grounding the cosmic title in covenant history. The verbs *shim'ah* ('hear') and *ha'azinah* ('give ear, listen attentively') are synonymous pleas for divine attention — the psalmist interrupts the meditation on pilgrimage with direct petition.
10. The word *magen* ('shield') may refer to God as Israel's shield, or to the king as Israel's shield. The word *meshikhekha* ('Your anointed one') is *mashiach* — the anointed king of the Davidic line. The psalmist asks God to look favorably on the king, through whose leadership the nation's worship is sustained. In later interpretation, this verse was read messianically — the anointed one whose face God gazes upon becomes the awaited Messiah.
11. The verb *histofef* (Hithpolel of *suf* or *safaf*) is debated: it may mean 'to stand at the threshold' or 'to be a doorkeeper.' Either way, it describes the lowest possible position of access — the person who barely gets inside, who stands at the outer edge. The psalmist's preference for the margin of God's house over the center of the wicked's tent is the psalm's defining value statement.
12. The sun metaphor for God was risky in ancient Israel, where sun worship was a constant temptation (2 Kings 23:11 records Josiah removing horses dedicated to the sun from the temple). By calling God 'sun,' the psalmist claims for YHWH what the nations attributed to solar deities — light, warmth, life-giving power — while containing it within Israelite monotheism.
13. The psalm began with YHWH Tsevaot (v. 2) and ends with YHWH Tsevaot (v. 13), forming an inclusio. Everything between is framed by the same name: the LORD of Hosts. The final beatitude strips away every external condition — temple access, pilgrimage, residence — and locates blessedness in trust alone. Anyone who trusts is blessed, whether they stand at the threshold or dwell in the innermost court.

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Summary: *A Korahite psalm in three movements. The first (vv. 2-4) recalls God's past restoration of Jacob — the return from captivity, the forgiveness of sin, the turning away of wrath. The second (vv. 5-8) pleads for God to do it again, asking how long His anger will last and whether He will not revive His people once more. The third (vv. 9-14) is a prophetic oracle: the psalmist listens for what God will speak, and envisions a world where faithful love and truth meet, where righteousness and peace kiss, where truth springs up from the earth and righteousness looks down from heaven. The psalm closes with the LORD giving what is good and the land yielding its harvest.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Verses 11-14 contain one of the most beautiful and theologically dense visions in the Psalter. Four divine attributes — *chesed* (faithful love), *emet* (truth), *tsedaqah* (righteousness), and *shalom* (peace) — are personified as actors in a cosmic reunion. Faithful love and truth meet each other; righteousness and peace kiss. Truth springs from the earth below while righteousness looks down from the sky above. The image is of heaven and earth reconnecting, of divine qualities descending and earthly response ascending, of a world fully realigned with God's character. This is not mere poetry; it is a vision of cosmic restoration — the world as it was meant to be, where every attribute of God finds its counterpart in creation.*

Translation Friction: *The 'return of captivity' (*shevut Ya'aqov*) in verse 2 is debated. The phrase *shuv shevut* can mean 'to return the captivity' (a specific historical reference to exile and return) or 'to restore the fortunes' (a more general theological reversal). If the former, the psalm dates to the post-exilic period; if the latter, it could be pre-exilic. The psalm's theology does not depend on the dating — the pattern of remembering past restoration to petition for present renewal is timeless.*

Connections: *The personified meeting of *chesed* and *emet* (v. 11) echoes Proverbs 3:3 and 16:6, where these two qualities appear as a pair. The vision of righteousness looking down from heaven anticipates Isaiah 45:8 ('Drip down, O heavens, from above, and let the skies rain righteousness'). The land yielding its produce (v. 13) echoes the covenant blessings of Leviticus 26:4 and Deuteronomy 28:12. The psalm's three-part structure — past deliverance, present plea, future vision — mirrors the pattern of prophetic hope found throughout Isaiah 40-66.*

- ¹For the choirmaster. Of the sons of Korah. A psalm.
- ²O LORD, You showed favor to Your land;
You restored the fortunes of Jacob.
- ³You forgave the guilt of Your people;
You covered all their sin. Selah.
- ⁴You withdrew all Your fury;
You turned from Your burning anger.
- ⁵Restore us, O God of our salvation,
and put an end to Your displeasure with us.
- ⁶Will You be angry with us forever?
Will You extend Your anger to every generation?
- ⁷Will You not revive us again,
so that Your people may rejoice in You?
- ⁸Show us Your faithful love, O LORD,
and grant us Your salvation.
- ⁹Let me hear what God the LORD will speak,
for He will speak peace to His people,
to His faithful ones —
but let them not return to foolishness.
- ¹⁰Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him,
so that glory may dwell in our land.
- ¹¹Faithful love and truth have met;
righteousness and peace have kissed.
- ¹²Truth springs up from the earth,
and righteousness looks down from heaven.
- ¹³The LORD Himself will give what is good,
and our land will yield its harvest.
- ¹⁴Righteousness goes before Him
and prepares the way for His steps.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Another Korahite psalm, continuing the second Korahite collection (Psalms 84-85, 87-88). The Korahite psalms in this section share a focus on Zion theology — God's dwelling, God's land, God's city — and the longing for divine presence that defines the Korahite voice.
2. The verb *ratsita* ('You showed favor, You were pleased with') from *ratsah* means to accept, to take delight in, to be gracious toward. The phrase *shavta shevit Ya'aqov* ('You returned the captivity/fortunes of Jacob') uses the idiom *shuv shevut*, which can refer to a literal return from exile or a general restoration of well-being. The psalmist establishes precedent: You have done this before.
3. Two verbs of forgiveness: *nasata* ('You bore, You carried away, You forgave') from *nasa* means to lift up and remove — God picks up the guilt and carries it away. *kissita* ('You covered') from *kasah* means to conceal, to hide from sight — God covers the sin so it is no longer visible. Together they describe forgiveness as both removal and concealment: the sin is taken away and hidden. The *selah* may mark a pause for the congregation to absorb the weight of this remembered mercy.

4. The verb *asafta* ('You gathered in, You withdrew') from *asaf* means to collect back, to pull in. God's fury (*evratekha*, from *avar*, 'to overflow, to rage') was out — deployed, active — and God gathered it back. The phrase *charon af* ('burning of the nostril') is the standard Hebrew idiom for intense anger — the image is of nostrils flaring with heat. God turned from this heat. Past tense: He did this. The question is whether He will do it again.
5. The verb *shuvenu* ('restore us, turn us, bring us back') from *shuv* is the same root as *teshuvah* ('repentance, return'). The psalmist asks God to do the turning — the people cannot return on their own. The title *Elohei yish'enu* ('God of our salvation') grounds the petition in God's identity as savior. The verb *hafer* ('break, annul, put an end to') from *parar* means to shatter, to dissolve — the psalmist wants God's anger literally broken apart.
6. Two questions that are also arguments: if God's anger lasts forever, it contradicts His character as the God of salvation (v. 5) and the God who previously forgave (vv. 3-4). The verb *timshokh* ('will You drag out, extend, prolong') from *mashakh* means to stretch, to pull like a rope. Will God's anger stretch endlessly across generations? The implied answer is no — the God who once withdrew His fury will do so again.
7. The verb *techayyenu* ('You will revive us, give us life') from *chayah* means to make alive, to restore to vitality. The psalmist asks for resurrection — not from death but from the living death of divine displeasure. Revival is not an end in itself: it serves rejoicing. The people need to be made alive so they can be glad in God. Joy is the goal of restoration.
8. The verb *har'enu* ('show us, let us see') from *ra'ah* means to make visible — the psalmist wants to see God's *chesed* (faithful love) manifested in concrete action, not merely believed as doctrine. The parallel 'grant us Your salvation' (*yesh'akha titten lanu*) makes *chesed* and salvation nearly synonymous: faithful love is salvation, and salvation is the visible proof of faithful love.
9. The shift from petition (vv. 5-8) to prophetic listening (v. 9) marks the psalm's structural pivot. The psalmist stops asking and starts listening. What follows (vv. 10-14) is the content of what God speaks — a vision of restored creation that answers every petition the psalm has raised.
10. The word *qarov* ('near, close') establishes proximity — salvation is not distant or abstract but close at hand. The purpose: *lishkon kavod be-artsenu* ('so that glory may dwell in our land'). The verb *shakan* ('to dwell, to tabernacle') is the root of *Shekhinah* — God's dwelling presence. The psalm envisions *kavod* ('glory') — the visible weight of God's presence — taking up permanent residence in the land. This is the ultimate goal of restoration: not merely forgiveness but the return of God's manifested presence.
11. The four attributes — *chesed*, *emet*, *tsedeq*, *shalom* — are the foundational qualities of God's character and God's kingdom. Their personified meeting describes a world restored to wholeness, where no divine attribute is sacrificed for another. In fallen reality, justice and mercy seem opposed; in the restored world, they kiss.
12. The agricultural metaphor — truth 'sprouts' from the earth — suggests that truth is not imposed from outside but grows organically from a restored creation. When the land is healed, truth is its natural produce. Righteousness gazing down from heaven is the divine counterpart: God's order descending to meet earth's response. Isaiah 45:8 develops this same imagery: 'Drip down, O heavens, from above, and let the skies rain righteousness; let the earth open and let salvation sprout.'
13. The vision moves from cosmic abstraction to agricultural reality: the LORD gives *ha-tov* ('the good') and the land gives *yevulah* ('its produce, its yield'). The two givings mirror each other — God gives from above, the land gives from below. The word *yevul* ('produce, harvest') grounds the theology in material blessing: restored relationship with God results in literal abundance. The covenant blessings of Deuteronomy 28:1-14 are being fulfilled.
14. The personification of righteousness as a road-preparer echoes Isaiah 40:3 ('Prepare the way of the LORD') and anticipates the New Testament application to John the Baptist. The image of God walking suggests the return of divine presence to the land — the *kavod* ('glory') of verse 10 now in motion, approaching, arriving.

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Summary: *The only psalm in Book III attributed to David, this is a prayer of deep personal need woven almost entirely from phrases found elsewhere in Scripture. David pleads for God's ear, confesses his dependence, asks for mercy, and declares God's uniqueness among all so-called gods. He petitions for instruction in God's way, for an undivided heart, and for a sign of God's favor. The psalm is simultaneously desperate and confident — every cry for help is anchored in a declaration of who God is.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This psalm is a mosaic. Nearly every line echoes or quotes another biblical text — Exodus 34:6, Psalm 25, Psalm 27, Psalm 54, Isaiah 43, and others. Some scholars have called it derivative; a better reading is that David prays in the language of Scripture itself. He has so internalized God's word that his spontaneous prayer sounds like a concordance. The centerpiece is verse 11: 'Teach me Your way, O LORD, that I may walk in Your truth; unite my heart to fear Your name.' The verb *yached* ('unite') appears only here in the Psalter — David asks God to gather his scattered heart into a single focus. The divided heart, pulled in multiple directions by desire and fear, needs to be made one.*

Translation Friction: The Davidic attribution is unusual in Book III (Psalms 73-89), which is otherwise dominated by Asaphite and Korahite collections. Some scholars see this as a later insertion, while others view it as an intentional Davidic voice placed within the communal collections to remind the worshipping community that the king, too, is a suppliant before God. The phrase 'among the gods there is none like You' (v. 8) uses elohim in a way consistent with Psalm 82's divine council theology — the existence of other elohim is acknowledged, but their incomparability with YHWH is asserted.

Connections: Verse 15 quotes Exodus 34:6 nearly verbatim — the great self-revelation of God's character after the golden calf disaster. The petition 'teach me Your way' (v. 11) echoes Psalm 25:4 and 27:11. The declaration 'there is none like You among the gods' (v. 8) connects to Exodus 15:11, Deuteronomy 3:24, and Psalm 82. The request for an 'undivided heart' (v. 11) anticipates Ezekiel 11:19 and Jeremiah 32:39, where God promises to give His people 'one heart.' David's prayer becomes God's future promise.

¹A prayer of David.

Bend down Your ear, O LORD, and answer me,
for I am afflicted and needy.

²Guard my life, for I am devoted to You.
Save Your servant, O my God —
the one who trusts in You.

³Be gracious to me, O Lord,
for to You I call all day long.

⁴Gladden the soul of Your servant,
for to You, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

⁵For You, O Lord, are good and forgiving,
abounding in faithful love to all who call on You.

⁶Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer;
attend to the voice of my pleas for mercy.

⁷In the day of my distress I call on You,
for You will answer me.

⁸There is none like You among the gods, O Lord,
and nothing compares to Your works.

⁹All the nations You have made will come
and bow down before You, O Lord,
and glorify Your name.

¹⁰For You are great and do wondrous things;
You alone are God.

¹¹Teach me Your way, O LORD,
that I may walk in Your truth.
Unite my heart to fear Your name.

¹²I will praise You, O Lord my God, with all my heart,
and I will glorify Your name forever.

¹³For Your faithful love toward me is great,
and You have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.

¹⁴O God, the arrogant have risen against me;
a band of ruthless men seeks my life —
they do not set You before them.

¹⁵But You, O Lord, are a God
compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger,
abounding in faithful love and truth.

¹⁶Turn to me and be gracious to me;
give Your strength to Your servant
and save the son of Your maidservant.

¹⁷Show me a sign of Your goodness,
so that those who hate me will see it and be put to shame,
because You, O LORD, have helped me and comforted me.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb *hatteh* ('bend down, incline, turn') asks God to lower His ear — as if God is high and David is low, and the distance between them must be bridged by God stooping. The self-description *ani ve-eyon* ('afflicted and needy') is the language of the poor throughout the Psalter (cf. Psalms 40:18, 70:6). David, the king, identifies himself with the destitute — not as false humility but as theological reality: before God, even the king is a beggar.
2. The word *chasid* ('devoted one, faithful one, one bound by chesed') describes David not as morally perfect but as covenantally loyal — bound to God by faithful love. The self-designation *avdekha* ('Your servant') appears repeatedly in this psalm (vv. 2, 4, 16), establishing David's posture: he is not demanding as a king but petitioning as a servant.
3. The verb *chonneni* ('be gracious to me, show me favor') from *chanan* is the plea for undeserved kindness. The address shifts to *Adonai* ('Lord, Master') rather than *YHWH* — the title of authority rather than the covenant name. The phrase *kol hayyom* ('all day long') indicates not a single prayer session but continuous, unceasing appeal.
4. The verb *sammeach* ('gladden, make joyful') is a Piel imperative — David asks God to cause joy, not merely permit it. The phrase *nafshi essa* ('my soul I lift up') echoes Psalm 25:1 verbatim. Lifting the soul is an act of total surrender — offering one's entire inner life to God as an upward gesture of dependence and trust.
5. The adjective *sallach* ('forgiving, ready to pardon') appears only here and in Nehemiah 9:17 — it is an exceedingly rare word, applied exclusively to God. The phrase *rav chesed* ('abounding in faithful love') is drawn from the Exodus 34:6 self-revelation of God. David does not merely believe God is forgiving; he knows it from the tradition he has internalized.
6. Two verbs of attentive hearing: *ha'azinah* ('give ear') and *haqshivah* ('attend, pay attention, listen carefully'). The word *tachanunot* ('pleas for mercy, supplications') from *chanan* carries the tone of begging — these are not formal requests but desperate appeals for grace.
7. The confidence embedded in *ki ta'aneni* ('for You will answer me') transforms the plea into a declaration of trust. David does not call hoping God might answer; he calls knowing God will answer. The 'day of distress' (*yom tsarati*) is a recurring phrase in the Psalter (cf. 50:15, 77:3) — the moment when all human resources fail and only God remains.
8. The phrase *ein kamokha* ('none like You') echoes Exodus 15:11 ('Who is like You among the gods, O LORD?') and Deuteronomy 3:24. Each occurrence makes the same comparative argument: other powers may exist, but they are not in the same category as YHWH. This is not henotheism (worshipping one god while acknowledging others as real threats) but incomparability theology: YHWH is so different from other *elohim* that comparison itself becomes absurd.
9. The universalism of this verse is striking in a Davidic psalm: *kol goyim asher asita* ('all nations that You have made'). David envisions every nation — not just Israel — coming to worship before God. The verb *yishtachavu* ('bow down, prostrate themselves') is the most physical form of worship: forehead to ground. And *vikhabbedu li-shmekha* ('they will glorify Your name') — the nations will add weight (*kavod*) to God's reputation. This anticipates the universal vision of Isaiah 2:2-4 and Psalm 87.
10. The phrase *attah Elohim levaddekha* ('You alone are God') is the strongest monotheistic declaration in the psalm. After acknowledging other *elohim* in verse 8, David now asserts that YHWH alone deserves the title. The word *nifla'ot* ('wondrous things, miracles') from *pala* ('to be wonderful, to be

beyond comprehension') describes acts that exceed human understanding — the exodus, creation, deliverance.

11. The verb *yached* appears only here in the Psalter and is exceedingly rare in the Hebrew Bible. Its singularity is appropriate: the request itself is singular. An undivided heart is the rarest and most necessary condition for genuine worship. Kierkegaard's famous phrase 'purity of heart is to will one thing' is a commentary on this verse whether he knew it or not.
12. The response to the prayer for a united heart (v. 11) is a vow of wholehearted praise: *be-khol levavi* ('with all my heart'). The heart that was fragmented and needed uniting will, once healed, praise with its full capacity. The phrase *akhabdah shimkha le-olam* ('I will glorify Your name forever') commits to permanent, ongoing honor — the united heart does not waver back into division.
13. The phrase *she'ol tachtiyyah* ('the lowest Sheol, the depths of the underworld') is the superlative of death — not merely dying but descending to the deepest pit. David's deliverance was not from minor trouble but from the very bottom of the abyss. The greatness of chesed is measured by the depth of the rescue: the further you fell, the greater the love that pulled you out.
14. The word *zedim* ('arrogant, insolent, presumptuous') describes those who act without regard for any authority above themselves. The *adat aritsim* ('assembly of ruthless ones') is a violent group organized for oppression. Their defining characteristic: *ve-lo samukha le-negdam* ('they have not set You before them'). They have no awareness of God in their field of vision. The violence flows from the absence of God-consciousness — they are dangerous because they are godless.
15. The Exodus 34:6-7 formula is the most frequently quoted scripture within Scripture itself — it appears in Joel 2:13, Jonah 4:2, Nahum 1:3, Psalms 103:8, 145:8, Nehemiah 9:17, and here. Each context adapts it slightly. David's version omits the judgment clause ('who will by no means clear the guilty') and retains only the mercy side — appropriate for a prayer of supplication rather than a creed about divine justice.
16. The phrase *ben amatekha* ('son of Your maidservant') means someone born in the master's household — not an outsider who entered service but one born into it. David claims the deepest possible belonging: he is not merely God's servant by choice but by birth. He was born into God's household. The term parallels Psalm 116:16.
17. The *ot le-tovah* ('sign for good') is not a miraculous spectacle but a visible marker of God's favor — something the enemies can see with their own eyes that proves God is on David's side. The final verbs — *azartani* ('You helped me') and *nichamtani* ('You comforted me') — shift to the perfect tense, as if David is already speaking from the other side of deliverance. He ends the psalm in the past tense of answered prayer, confident that what he has asked for is already accomplished.

87

Summary: *A brief, enigmatic Korahite psalm celebrating Zion as the city of God. The LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of the city. Then the psalm makes a startling declaration: Rahab (Egypt), Babylon, Philistia, Tyre, and Cush will all be registered as born in Zion. The LORD Himself will write in the register of the peoples that 'this one was born there.' The psalm closes with singers and dancers declaring, 'All my springs are in you.'*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This is one of the most radically inclusive texts in the Hebrew Bible. The nations listed — Egypt, Babylon, Philistia, Tyre, Cush — are not merely Israel's neighbors; they are Israel's historical enemies and oppressors. Egypt enslaved Israel; Babylon would destroy the temple; Philistia was a perennial military threat; Tyre was a mercantile rival. Yet the psalm declares that these nations will be registered as born in Zion — they will receive Zion citizenship. The image is of a divine birth register in which God Himself inscribes the nations as native-born children of His city. This is not conquest or conversion in the usual sense; it is adoption by divine decree. The enemies of Zion become the children of Zion.*

Translation Friction: *The Hebrew text of this psalm is notoriously difficult — some scholars call it the most obscure psalm in the Psalter. The grammar is compressed, the subject shifts abruptly, and the antecedents of pronouns are often unclear. The phrase 'this one was born there' (*zeh yullad sham*) is repeated as a refrain, but who is speaking and about whom varies with each line. The translation must make interpretive decisions that the Hebrew intentionally leaves ambiguous. We follow the reading that sees God as the one who inscribes the nations in Zion's register.*

Connections: *The vision of nations being born in Zion anticipates Isaiah 2:2-4 (all nations streaming to Zion), Isaiah 19:23-25 (Egypt and Assyria called 'My people' and 'the work of My hands'), and Isaiah 56:3-8 (foreigners joining themselves to the LORD). The divine register echoes Exodus 32:32 (Moses asks to be blotted from God's book) and Ezekiel 13:9 (false prophets not written in the register of Israel). The phrase 'all my springs are in you' may connect to the temple spring imagery of Ezekiel 47:1-12 and Joel 3:18.*

¹Of the sons of Korah. A psalm. A song.
His foundation is on the holy mountains.

²more than all the dwelling places of Jacob.
The LORD loves the gates of Zion

³Glorious things are spoken of you —
O city of God. Selah.

⁴I will mention Rahab and Babylon among those who know Me.
Look — Philistia, Tyre, and Cush:
'This one was born there.'

⁵And of Zion it will be said,
'This one and that one were born in her.'
The Most High Himself will establish her.

⁶The LORD will record in the register of the peoples:
'This one was born there.' Selah.

⁷Singers and dancers alike will say,
'All my springs are in you.'

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The word *yesudato* ('His foundation') refers to the city God has founded — Zion/Jerusalem, established by divine initiative on the sacred mountains. The plural *harrerei qodesh* ('holy mountains') may refer to the multiple hills of Jerusalem (Zion, Moriah, Ophel) or may be a poetic plural intensifying the holiness of the single mountain. The psalm opens with architecture: what God has built is the subject.
2. The comparison 'more than all the dwelling places of Jacob' raises a startling theological question: Does God have favorites among His own people's cities? The answer this psalm gives is yes — Zion holds a unique place in God's affections because it is where He chose to place His name (Deuteronomy 12:5). The love is not arbitrary; it is covenantal.
3. The passive *nikhbadot medubbar bakh* ('glorious things are being spoken about you') leaves the speaker unidentified — it may be God, the prophets, the nations, or the psalm itself. The title *ir ha-Elohim* ('city of God') designates Jerusalem/Zion as God's personal city — His capital, His home on earth. What follows (vv. 4-6) will reveal what these 'glorious things' are: the enrollment of the nations.
4. The name Rahab (not the same as Rahab the woman of Jericho) is a mythological sea monster representing chaos and, by extension, Egypt (Isaiah 51:9, Psalm 89:11). By using this name, the psalmist invokes Egypt at its most threatening — and then registers this monster-nation as born in Zion. The shock is intentional: the worst enemy becomes a sibling.
5. The title Elyon ('Most High') connects this verse to Psalm 82:6 (sons of the Most High) and 83:19 (YHWH alone is Most High over all the earth). The same God who judged the failed divine council and who rules over all nations now establishes Zion as the universal birthplace. The theology has moved from national election to universal inclusion — all under the authority of the Most High.
6. The image of God as census-taker and registrar is unique in the Hebrew Bible. The divine register appears elsewhere (Exodus 32:32, Psalm 69:29, Daniel 12:1, Malachi 3:16), but always as a record of the righteous. Here it is a birth register of the nations — the most universalist application of the image anywhere in Scripture.
7. The final phrase *kol ma'yanai bakh* ('all my springs are in you') is addressed to Zion and may allude to the temple as a source of living water — a theme developed in Ezekiel 47:1-12, Joel 3:18, and Zechariah 14:8, where a river flows from the temple to water the earth. The springs are both literal (the Gihon spring that supplied Jerusalem) and theological (God's city as the source of life for all peoples).

88

Summary: *The darkest psalm in the Psalter. A Korahite psalm attributed also to Heman the Ezrahite, this lament begins with a cry to God and never resolves. The psalmist describes a life spent at the edge of Sheol — overwhelmed by God's wrath, cut off from friends, trapped in a pit with no escape. Every section pleads for God's attention, and every section receives silence. The psalmist asks devastating theological questions: Do You work wonders for the dead? Will the shades rise to praise You? Is Your faithful love declared in the grave? The psalm ends with the word darkness. There is no dawn, no rescue, no turning point. It is the only psalm with no note of hope.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 88 is unique in the entire Psalter: it is the only psalm that ends in unrelieved darkness. Every other lament — even the most agonized — turns at some point toward hope, trust, or praise. Psalm 88 does not. It begins in distress and ends in distress. The final word of the poem is choshekh ('darkness'). This is not a failure of faith but a witness to a kind of suffering so complete that no resolution is possible within the poem itself. The psalm's inclusion in the canon testifies to something extraordinary: Israel's worship tradition made room for the voice that cannot find comfort, the sufferer for whom the night does not end. The psalm does not resolve because some suffering does not resolve — and God's word includes that reality.*

Translation Friction: *The double attribution — 'of the sons of Korah' and 'of Heman the Ezrahite' — is unusual. Heman was one of the three chief musicians appointed by David (1 Chronicles 6:33, 15:17), and 'Ezrahite' may mean 'native-born' or may link him to the clan of Zerah. The relationship between the Korahite attribution and the Heman attribution is unclear — he may have been a Korahite who also carried the Ezrahite designation. The term mahalat le-annot in the superscription is obscure — possibly 'for singing with suffering/affliction' or a musical direction indicating a mournful mode.*

Connections: *The questions of verses 11-13 ('Is Your faithful love declared in the grave? Your faithfulness in Abaddon?') anticipate the theological crisis of death that runs through Ecclesiastes and finds resolution only in later texts like Daniel 12:2 and Isaiah 26:19. The language of the pit (bor), Sheol, and Abaddon connects to Job 10:20-22 and Psalm 30:4. Heman's personal anguish — 'I have been afflicted and near death since my youth' (v. 16) — makes this psalm a companion to Job: both are righteous sufferers who receive no explanation and find no relief within their own narrative.*

¹A song. A psalm of the sons of Korah.

For the choirmaster. According to Mahalath Leannoth.

A maskil of Heman the Ezrahite.

²O LORD, God of my salvation,
I cry out before You day and night.

³Let my prayer come before You;
bend Your ear to my cry.

⁴For my soul is full of troubles,
and my life has reached the brink of Sheol.

⁵I am counted among those who go down to the pit;
I have become like a man with no strength.

⁶Set loose among the dead,
like the slain who lie in the grave
whom You remember no more —
they are cut off from Your hand.

⁷You have placed me in the deepest pit,
in dark places, in the depths.

⁸Your wrath lies heavy upon me,
and You overwhelm me with all Your breakers. Selah.

⁹You have driven my closest friends far from me;
You have made me loathsome to them.
I am shut in and cannot escape.

¹⁰My eye wastes away from affliction.
I call on You, O LORD, every day;
I spread out my hands to You.

¹¹Do You work wonders for the dead?
Will the shades rise up to praise You? Selah.

¹²Is Your faithful love declared in the grave?
Your faithfulness in Abaddon?

¹³Are Your wonders known in the darkness?
Your righteousness in the land of oblivion?

¹⁴But I — to You, O LORD, I cry out,
and in the morning my prayer meets You.

¹⁵Why, O LORD, do You reject my soul?
Why do You hide Your face from me?

¹⁶I have been afflicted and near death since my youth;
I bear Your terrors — I am in despair.

¹⁷Your burning anger sweeps over me;
Your terrors destroy me.

¹⁸They surround me like water all day long;
they close in on me from every side.

¹⁹You have driven lover and friend far from me;
my closest companions are darkness.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The term mahalath le-annot is obscure. Mahalath may derive from chalah ('to be sick, to suffer') and le-annot from anah ('to sing' or 'to afflict'). If both meanings of anah are in play, the superscription could mean 'for singing about affliction' — a fitting description of the psalm's content. Maskil indicates a skillfully composed, instructive poem. The craftsmanship of this psalm is extraordinary despite — or because of — its unrelieved darkness.
2. This is the only point in the psalm where God is called 'God of my salvation.' Every subsequent reference focuses on God's wrath, rejection, or silence. The saving title at the beginning makes the darkness that follows even more complete — the God who saves has, in this psalmist's experience, not saved.
3. The verb tavo ('let it come, let it enter') asks that the prayer reach God's presence — as if there is a distance between the psalmist and God that the prayer must cross. The verb hatteh ('bend down, incline') asks God to lower Himself to listen — the same request David makes in Psalm 86:1. The word rinnah ('cry, ringing cry, shout') here carries the tone of anguish rather than joy.

4. The verb *save'ah* ('is full, is satisfied, has had enough') is bitterly ironic — the word normally describes being filled with good things (Psalm 17:15, 'I will be satisfied with Your likeness'). Here the soul is sated with *ra'ot* ('evils, troubles, calamities'). The soul has eaten its fill — of suffering. The phrase *chayyai li-she'ol higg'i'u* ('my life has reached Sheol') means the psalmist stands at the threshold of death, not yet dead but close enough to touch the underworld.
5. The verb *nechshavti* ('I am counted, I am reckoned') from *chashav* means to be categorized, classified — the living have placed the psalmist in the category of the dying. The *bor* ('pit, cistern') is a common synonym for Sheol — the underground cavity where the dead are gathered. The phrase *ke-gever ein eyal* ('like a man with no strength') describes total depletion — *eyal* ('strength, power, might') has been drained completely.
6. The verb *nigzaru* ('cut off') from *gazar* means to sever, to divide. The dead are severed from God's active care. This verse presents the ancient Israelite understanding of death at its bleakest: the dead are in Sheol, God does not remember them, and they are cut off from His power. This understanding will later be challenged by Daniel 12:2 and the resurrection hope of Second Temple Judaism.
7. Three words of descent: *bor tachtiyyot* ('the pit of the lowest places'), *machashakkim* ('dark places, places of darkness'), and *metsolot* ('depths, ocean deeps'). The psalmist is sinking — deeper than the pit, into darkness, into oceanic depth. And the subject of the verb is You: *shattani* ('You placed me'). God did this. The psalmist does not attribute the suffering to enemies or to chance but to God's own hand. This is the psalm's terrible honesty.
8. The verb *samkhah* ('lies heavy, presses down') from *samakh* means to lean on, to press upon — God's wrath (*chamatekha*, 'Your heat, Your poison, Your fury') is a physical weight crushing the psalmist. The word *mishbarekha* ('Your breakers') from *shavar* ('to break') refers to crashing waves — the ocean surge that breaks everything in its path. God's waves — not random waves, but Your waves — batter the psalmist. Selah.
9. The verb *hirqaqta* ('You have made distant') from *rachaq* means to push away, to create distance. God is the one who separated the psalmist from community. The word *to'evot* ('abomination, loathsome thing') is extreme — the same word used for ritual impurity and moral revulsion (Leviticus 18:22, Deuteronomy 7:25). The psalmist has become repulsive to former friends. And *kalu* ('shut in, imprisoned') means locked up with no exit. The triple isolation — from friends, from society, from escape — is complete.
10. The verb *da'avah* ('wastes away, pines, grows dim') describes eyes failing from constant weeping or illness. The gesture of spreading out hands (*shittachti kappay*) is the posture of open-palmed prayer — hands extended, empty, receiving. The psalmist prays every day with empty hands held out to God, and every day the hands remain empty.
11. The *Rephaim* (*refa'im*) in this context are not the giant warrior clan of Genesis 14:5 but the shades of the dead — a term for the deceased inhabitants of Sheol. The word may derive from *raphah* ('to be weak, to sink down'). The dead in Sheol are diminished, powerless, unable to praise. This understanding of death as the cessation of worship is the backdrop against which later resurrection theology develops.
12. Two locations of death are paired with two divine attributes: *chesed* ('faithful love') in the *qever* ('grave'), and *emunah* ('faithfulness') in *Avaddon* ('Destruction/Abaddon'). *Abaddon*, from *avad* ('to perish, to be destroyed'), is personified as a place — the realm of destruction, a synonym for the deepest part of Sheol. The questions are rhetorical arguments: if the grave cannot declare *chesed* and *Abaddon* cannot proclaim *emunah*, then keeping the psalmist alive serves God's own interest.
13. The 'land of oblivion' (*erets neshiyyah*) from *nashah* ('to forget') is the realm where memory ceases. The dead forget and are forgotten. God's *pele* ('wonder') and *tsidqatekha* ('Your righteousness') cannot be known in a place where knowing has stopped. The four questions of verses 11-13 form a devastating theological syllogism: the dead cannot praise, cannot declare, cannot know. If God lets the psalmist die, the testimony dies with him.
14. The emphatic *va-ani* ('but I') sets the psalmist against the silence of the dead — they cannot cry out, but I can, and I do. The phrase *u-va-boqer* ('and in the morning') suggests that the psalmist prays at dawn — the traditional hour of hope and renewal. But in this psalm, the morning brings no relief. The verb *teqaddemekka* ('meets You, comes before You, anticipates You') means the prayer arrives before God even acts — it is there waiting when God turns to look.
15. The verb *tiznach* ('You reject, You cast off, You abandon') from *zanach* is the word for discarding something as worthless. The psalmist does not merely feel neglected — they feel thrown away. And *tastir panekha mimmenni* ('You hide Your face from me') — the hidden face of God is the most terrifying condition in Hebrew theology. God's face is His presence, His favor, His attention. When God hides His face, the worshipper is left in absolute darkness.
16. The phrase *mi-no'ar* ('since youth, from boyhood') reveals that this is not a temporary crisis but a lifelong condition. The psalmist has known suffering from the beginning. The word *emekha* ('Your terrors') from *emah* ('terror, dread') attributes the terror directly to God — these are not generic fears but divinely imposed horrors. The final word *afunah* is obscure — it may mean 'I am numb,' 'I am in despair,' or 'I am helpless.' Its very obscurity mirrors the psalmist's disorientation.
17. The verb *avru* ('pass over, sweep over') describes God's anger like a flood — wave after wave of *charon* ('burning rage'). The verb *tsimmetutuni* ('they destroy me, they silence me, they annihilate me') from *tsamat* means to cut off, to destroy completely. The psalmist is not merely suffering but being systematically dismantled by divine wrath.
18. The image of water surrounding (*savvuni ka-mayim*) echoes verse 8's breakers. The terrors of God are like rising floodwater — enveloping, inescapable, constant (*kol hayyom*, 'all day long'). The verb *hiqqifu* ('they encircle, they close in') from *naqaf* means to go around completely, to form a ring. There is no gap, no escape route, no dry ground.

19. The final word *machshakh* ('darkness') has no verb, no continuation, no resolution. The Hebrew syntax simply stops. This is not accidental — the poet chose to end the psalm with darkness as a noun, not as a condition that might change. The reader is left in the dark alongside the psalmist, with no promise of dawn. The psalm's canonical placement — between the radiant Psalm 87 (Zion as universal birthplace) and the covenantal Psalm 89 (God's promises to David) — ensures that the darkness, while real, exists within a larger frame of divine faithfulness.

89

Summary: *The longest and most theologically weighty psalm of Book III, attributed to Ethan the Ezrahite. It moves in three massive sections. The first (vv. 2-19) is a hymn celebrating God's faithful love and faithfulness, His cosmic power over the sea and the heavenly council, and the blessedness of the people who know the festal shout. The second (vv. 20-38) recounts God's covenant with David in elaborate detail — the anointing, the promise of an unbreakable dynasty, the father-son relationship, the sworn oath that David's throne will endure forever. The third (vv. 39-52) is a devastating lament: God has apparently renounced the covenant, cast off the anointed one, broken down the walls, and handed David's enemies the victory. The psalm closes with a raw question: Where is Your former faithful love, O Lord, which You swore to David in Your faithfulness?*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This psalm is the great collision between theology and history. The first two sections build the most elaborate case for God's faithfulness in the entire Psalter: chesed is mentioned seven times, emunah five times, berit three times. God swore an oath. God made a covenant. God promised with His holiness. The dynasty would last like the sun and moon. And then the third section dismantles everything the first two built. The anointed one is rejected. The crown is profaned in the dust. The walls are breached. The enemies rejoice. The psalmist does not resolve the contradiction — he holds both realities in tension: God's sworn promise and God's apparent abandonment. This is not doubt; it is the most honest form of faith: demanding that God account for the gap between what He said and what has happened.*

Translation Friction: *The identity of Ethan the Ezrahite is debated — 1 Kings 4:31 names Ethan as a legendary wise man, and 1 Chronicles 15:19 names an Ethan as a Levitical musician alongside Heman and Asaph. The historical occasion of the lament section is also debated: it could reflect the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem (586 BCE), the humiliation of a specific king, or the general crisis of the Davidic dynasty's end. The psalm's placement at the end of Book III may be deliberate — it serves as the crisis that Book IV (beginning with Moses's Psalm 90) must address. The doxology in verse 53 is not part of the psalm but a liturgical addition marking the end of Book III.*

Connections: *The Davidic covenant language draws heavily from 2 Samuel 7 (Nathan's oracle) and Psalm 2. The cosmic hymn section echoes Psalm 74:12-17 (God's victory over the sea) and Job 26:12 (God crushing Rahab). The lament section parallels Lamentations 2 and 5. The phrase 'Where is Your former chesed?' (v. 50) echoes Isaiah 63:15 and anticipates the theological crisis of exile. The closing doxology (v. 53) connects to the similar doxologies ending Books I-IV (Psalms 41:14, 72:18-19, 106:48).*

¹A maskil of Ethan the Ezrahite.

²I will sing of the faithful love of the LORD forever;
with my mouth I will make known Your faithfulness
to every generation.

³For I said, 'Faithful love is built to last forever;
in the heavens You establish Your faithfulness.'

⁴I have cut a covenant with My chosen one;
I have sworn to David My servant:

⁵I will establish your offspring forever
and build your throne for every generation.' Selah.

⁶The heavens praise Your wonders, O LORD —
Your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones.

⁷For who in the skies can compare with the LORD?
Who among the sons of God is like the LORD?

⁸God is feared in the council of the holy ones —
great and awesome above all who surround Him.

⁹O LORD God of Hosts, who is like You?
Mighty is the LORD, and Your faithfulness surrounds You.

¹⁰You rule the surging of the sea;
when its waves rise, You still them.

¹¹You crushed Rahab like a slain corpse;
with Your mighty arm You scattered Your enemies.

¹²The heavens are Yours; the earth also is Yours.
The world and all it contains — You founded them.

¹³North and south — You created them.
Tabor and Hermon shout for joy at Your name.

¹⁴Yours is a mighty arm;
strong is Your hand, exalted is Your right hand.

¹⁵Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne;
faithful love and truth go before Your face.

¹⁶Blessed are the people who know the festal shout!
O LORD, they walk in the light of Your face.

¹⁷In Your name they rejoice all day long,
and in Your righteousness they are lifted high.

¹⁸For You are the splendor of their strength,
and by Your favor You lift up our horn.

¹⁹For our shield belongs to the LORD,
and our king to the Holy One of Israel.

²⁰Then You spoke in a vision to Your faithful one
and said, 'I have placed help on a warrior;
I have raised up one chosen from the people.

²¹with My holy oil I have anointed him.
I have found David My servant;

²²My hand will be established with him;
My arm will strengthen him.

²³No enemy will deceive him;
no son of wickedness will oppress him.

²⁴I will crush his foes before him
and strike down those who hate him.

²⁵My faithfulness and My faithful love are with him,
and in My name his horn is lifted high.

²⁶I will set his hand over the sea
and his right hand over the rivers.

²⁷He will call out to Me, 'You are my Father,
my God, and the rock of my salvation.'

²⁸And I will make him the firstborn,
the highest of the kings of the earth.

²⁹I will keep My faithful love for him forever,
and My covenant will stand firm for him.

³⁰I will establish his offspring forever
and his throne as the days of heaven.

³¹If his children abandon My the Law
and do not walk in My judgments,

³²if they violate My statutes
and do not keep My commandments,

³³then I will punish their rebellion with the rod
and their guilt with blows.

³⁴But My faithful love I will not withdraw from him,
and I will not be false to My faithfulness.

³⁵I will not violate My covenant
or alter the word that has gone from My lips.

³⁶Once I have sworn by My holiness;
I will not lie to David.

³⁷His offspring will endure forever,
and his throne like the sun before Me.

³⁸Like the moon, established forever —
a faithful witness in the sky. Selah.

³⁹But You — You have rejected and spurned;
You have raged against Your anointed one.

⁴⁰You have renounced the covenant of Your servant;
You have profaned his crown to the ground.

⁴¹You have broken through all his walls;
You have laid his fortresses in ruins.

⁴²All who pass by plunder him;
he has become a disgrace to his neighbors.

⁴³You have raised the right hand of his foes;
You have made all his enemies rejoice.

⁴⁴You have turned back the edge of his sword
and have not sustained him in battle.

⁴⁵You have put an end to his splendor
and hurled his throne to the ground.

⁴⁶You have cut short the days of his youth;
You have covered him with shame. Selah.

⁴⁷How long, O LORD? Will You hide Yourself forever?
Will Your wrath burn like fire?

⁴⁸Remember how fleeting my life is!
For what futility have You created all mortals!

⁴⁹What person can live and not see death?
Who can deliver their soul from the grip of Sheol? Selah.

⁵⁰Where are Your former acts of faithful love, O Lord,
which You swore to David in Your faithfulness?

⁵¹Remember, O Lord, the disgrace of Your servants;
how I bear in my chest the taunts of all the many peoples.

⁵²with which Your enemies taunt, O LORD,
with which they taunt the footsteps of Your anointed one.

⁵³Blessed be the LORD forever.
Amen and amen.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Ethan the Ezrahite appears in 1 Kings 4:31 as one of the wisest men of his era — surpassed only by Solomon. The pairing of Psalm 88 (Heman the Ezrahite) with Psalm 89 (Ethan the Ezrahite) places two Ezrahite wisdom figures side by side: one in unrelied darkness, the other in the tension between covenant promise and covenant crisis.
2. The word *olam* ('forever, eternity') applied to *chesed* is the psalm's foundational claim — and its most contested one. If *chesed* is forever, how do you explain the anointed one lying profaned in the dust? The psalm does not answer this question. It holds the claim and the contradiction together.
3. The verb *yibbaneh* ('is built, is constructed') from *banah* applies architectural language to *chesed* — faithful love is not a feeling but a structure, something built and maintained. The parallel places *emunah* in the heavens (*shamayim*), making faithfulness a cosmic reality, anchored above the reach of earthly disruption. The psalmist's claim is that *chesed* and *emunah* are as permanent as the sky itself.

4. God speaks directly, quoting His own covenant language. The verb *karati* ('I cut') is the standard covenant verb — covenants were 'cut' because animals were divided in the ratification ceremony (Genesis 15:9-18). The phrase *li-vchiri* ('with My chosen one') uses *bachir*, meaning the one selected, elected, singled out by divine choice. David is both *avdi* ('My servant') and *bechiri* ('My chosen') — claimed by God on both grounds of service and election.
5. Two promises: the perpetuation of David's *zera* ('seed, offspring, descendants') and the permanence of his *kisse* ('throne'). The verb *akhin* ('I will establish, make firm') from *kun* and the verb *vaniti* ('I will build') from *banah* use the same architectural language as verse 3 — *chesed* is built forever, and so is David's throne. The symmetry is intentional: the throne's permanence is grounded in *chesed*'s permanence.
6. The heavens (*shamayim*) praise, and the *qahal qedoshim* ('assembly of holy ones') — the divine council — proclaims *emunah*. The 'holy ones' (*qedoshim*) are angelic beings, members of the heavenly court. God's faithfulness is not merely an earthly claim but a celestial reality — the heavenly beings themselves witness to it. This sets up verse 7's comparison.
7. The word *shachaq* ('sky, cloud, heaven') and *benei elim* ('sons of gods, divine beings') place the comparison in the heavenly realm. Even among the celestial beings — not merely among humans — YHWH has no equal. The verb *ya'arokh* ('can compare, can be arranged alongside') from *arakh* means to set in a row, to place side by side for comparison. No heavenly being can stand in the same line as YHWH.
8. The *sod qedoshim rabbah* ('great council of holy ones') is the divine assembly — the same setting as Psalm 82:1. The verb *na'arats* ('is feared, is held in awe') from *arats* means to be terrifying, to inspire dread. God does not merely preside over the council; He terrifies it. The divine beings who surround God's throne are themselves in awe. The verse establishes God's incomparable majesty as the foundation for the covenant promises that follow.
9. The rhetorical question *mi khamokha* ('who is like You?') echoes Exodus 15:11 — the song at the Red Sea. The word *chasin* ('mighty, strong') from *chasan* is rare, emphasizing raw power. And *emunatkha sevivotekha* ('Your faithfulness surrounds You') — faithfulness is not just an attribute God possesses but an atmosphere that envelops Him. God walks in a cloud of faithfulness; it is the air around His throne.
10. The verb *moshel* ('You rule, You govern') establishes God's sovereignty over the sea — the primordial symbol of chaos in ancient Near Eastern cosmology. The verb *teshabchem* ('You still them, You calm them') from *shavach* means to soothe, to bring to rest. God does not merely withstand the waves; He silences them. This cosmic authority grounds the covenant promises: the God who controls the sea can certainly maintain a dynasty.
11. *Rahab* (*Rahav*) is the primordial sea monster — the chaos dragon representing the forces that oppose God's creative order. The verb *dikkita* ('You crushed, You shattered') from *daka* means to pulverize. God reduced the chaos monster to a corpse (*ke-chalal*, 'like a pierced one, like a slain body'). The phrase *bi-zero'a uzzekha* ('with the arm of Your strength') attributes the victory to God's own power. This cosmic victory narrative — God defeating the sea monster — is the mythological backdrop for the exodus (Isaiah 51:9-10 explicitly connects *Rahab* to Egypt and the Red Sea).
12. Total cosmic ownership: heavens, earth, *tevel* ('the inhabited world'), and its *melo'ah* ('fullness'). The verb *yesadtam* ('You founded them') from *yasad* means to lay a foundation. God is both owner and architect of everything that exists. The claim of universal ownership supports the covenant argument: the God who owns everything can surely keep one promise to one king.
13. The compass points (*tsafon/north, yamin/south-right*) represent the totality of direction, and the mountains (*Tabor in the west, Hermon in the north*) represent the geographic landmarks of the land. All of creation — directions and landmarks — celebrates God's name. The verb *yeranenu* ('they shout for joy') personifies the mountains as worshippers. Even the landscape praises.
14. Three images of divine power: *zero'a* ('arm'), *yad* ('hand'), and *yemin* ('right hand'). The arm is strength in action; the hand is power applied; the right hand is authority and favor. Together they describe a God whose power is active, directed, and supreme.
15. The four attributes — *tsedeq* (righteousness), *mishpat* (justice), *chesed* (faithful love), *emet* (truth) — form the complete character profile of God's kingship. They appear together here and in Psalm 85:10-14, creating a theological connection between the two psalms. When the psalmist later accuses God of abandoning the covenant, these four attributes are implicitly indicted: has the throne's foundation shifted?
16. The *teru'ah* ('festal shout, alarm, trumpet blast, shout of war or worship') is the sound of the *shofar* at festivals and the communal cry of worship. To 'know' the *teru'ah* means to be initiated into the worship of Israel — to participate in the festal life of God's people. These people walk *be-or panekha* ('in the light of Your face') — the opposite of the hidden face that Psalm 88 lamented. Where God's face shines, there is blessing.
17. Two grounds of celebration: God's name (*shem*, the personal identity and reputation of YHWH) and God's righteousness (*tsidqatekha*). The people rejoice not in their own strength but in who God is and what God does rightly. The verb *yarumu* ('they are lifted high, they are exalted') from *rum* means God's righteousness elevates His people — they rise because He is right.
18. The word *tiferet* ('splendor, beauty, glory') applied to *uzzamo* ('their strength') means God is the beautiful part of Israel's power — without God, their strength has no glory. The horn (*qeren*) is the symbol of power and dignity, and God's favor (*ratson*, 'pleasure, delight, acceptance') is what raises it. Israel's strength is not indigenous; it is given.
19. The 'shield' (*magen*) and 'king' (*malke*) both belong to God. The human king — the shield of the people — is himself God's possession. The title *Qedosh Yisra'el* ('Holy One of Israel') is characteristically Isaianic (occurring 25 times in Isaiah) but appears here to emphasize that Israel's king derives authority from Israel's God. This verse transitions to the Davidic covenant section.
20. The phrase *az dibbarta be-chazon* ('then You spoke in a vision') introduces the divine oracle that follows — likely referring to Nathan's prophecy in 2 Samuel 7. The 'faithful one' (*chasidekha*) may be Nathan, Samuel, or David himself. God chose a *gibbor* ('warrior, mighty one') and a *bachur* ('chosen one, young man') from the people (*me-am*) — David was not born into the royal line but was elevated from the common people.

21. The verb *matsati* ('I found') echoes 1 Samuel 13:14, where God tells Saul He has 'sought out a man after His own heart.' The finding implies that David was not obvious — he was the youngest son, overlooked by his own family (1 Samuel 16:11). God found what everyone else missed.
22. God's hand (*yad*) and arm (*zero'a*) — the instruments of divine power celebrated in verse 14 — are now pledged to David personally. The verb *tikkon* ('will be established') and *te'ammetsennu* ('will strengthen him') promise ongoing, active divine support. God's cosmic power is directed toward one man's success.
23. The verb *yasshi* ('will exact, will deceive, will lay a claim on') from *nasha* means to trick or to demand unjust payment. The *ben avlah* ('son of wickedness') is a person characterized by *avlah* ('injustice, perversity'). God promises that David will be protected from both deception and oppression. This promise will be tested severely in the lament section.
24. The verb *khattoti* ('I will crush, I will shatter') from *katat* and *eggof* ('I will strike, I will plague') from *nagaf* describe God personally fighting David's battles. The enemies are both *tsarav* ('his adversaries') and *mesan'av* ('those who hate him'). God's combat is personal: He fights because David's enemies are His enemies.
25. The two pillar words — *emunah* and *chesed* — are now specifically pledged to David. They are not merely cosmic attributes or general qualities; they are personally directed: *immo* ('with him'). And *be-shmi* ('in My name') — David's power (horn) is exalted through God's identity. The name is the channel through which divine authority flows to the human king.
26. The sea (*yam*) and rivers (*neharot*) represent both geographic extent (from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates) and cosmic authority (dominion over the primordial waters). God gives David authority over the same waters that God Himself rules (v. 10). The Davidic king participates in God's cosmic sovereignty.
27. The father-son relationship between God and the Davidic king is adoptive, not biological — it is established by covenant, not by nature. This distinguishes Israelite royal theology from Egyptian and Mesopotamian myths where kings were literally descended from gods. The Davidic king is God's son by covenant declaration, not by divine procreation.
28. The word *bekhor* ('firstborn') carries enormous significance — the firstborn received the double portion, the primary blessing, the leadership of the family. God makes David's line His firstborn among all the kings of the earth. The title *Elyon* ('highest, Most High') — normally reserved for God Himself (v. 8) — is now shared with the Davidic king: he is *elyon le-malkhei arets* ('the highest of earth's kings'). The king participates in God's supremacy.
29. Three key words converge: *chesed* ('faithful love'), *berit* ('covenant'), and *ne'emenet* ('stands firm, is faithful') from *aman* — the same root as *emunah*. God's faithful love is kept forever; God's covenant is *ne'emenet* — itself faithful. The covenant is not merely made; it is reliable, trustworthy, built on the same foundation as God's own character.
30. The phrase *ki-yimei shamayim* ('as the days of heaven') means as long as heaven endures — essentially, forever. David's dynasty is given cosmic permanence, anchored to the duration of the sky itself. The same architectural permanence promised to *chesed* in verse 3 is now promised to the throne.
31. The conditional section begins. God anticipates the failure of David's descendants: *im ya'azvu vanav torati* ('if his children abandon My Torah'). The verb *azav* ('to abandon, to forsake') is the standard word for covenant betrayal. Torah here encompasses all of God's instruction — law, teaching, guidance. The 'if' introduces a possibility that will become historical reality.
32. The verb *yechalelu* ('they violate, they profane') from *chalal* means to desecrate — to treat what is holy as common. The accumulation of covenant terms — Torah, *mishpatim*, *chuqot*, *mitsvot* (law, judgments, statutes, commandments) — covers every possible category of divine instruction. The conditional envisions total disobedience.
33. God will punish — but the punishment has a specific character: *be-shevet* ('with a rod'), the instrument of parental discipline, not execution. The word *pish'am* ('their rebellion, their transgression') from *pasha* means willful revolt, and *avonam* ('their guilt, their iniquity') from *avon* is the twisted consequence of sin. God disciplines like a father (cf. 2 Samuel 7:14), not like an executioner.
34. The phrase *lo ashaqer be-emunati* ('I will not be false to My faithfulness') makes *emunah* reflexive — God's faithfulness is a commitment to His own identity. To break the covenant would be to make God a liar, and God cannot lie (Numbers 23:19). This creates the irresolvable tension of the psalm: the covenant cannot be broken, but it appears to be broken.
35. The verb *achalel* ('I will violate, I will profane') is the same word used for the children's violation of God's statutes in verse 32. God will not do to His covenant what the children did to His law. And *u-motsa sefatai lo ashaneh* ('the utterance of My lips I will not change') — once God has spoken, the speech act is irrevocable. God's word, once released, cannot be recalled or revised.
36. God swears by *be-qodshi* ('My holiness') — His own sacred nature is the guarantee. Since there is nothing higher than God by which to swear (cf. Hebrews 6:13), God swears by Himself. The phrase *im le-David akhazzev* ('if I will lie to David' — a Hebrew oath formula where 'if' means 'I certainly will not') makes the promise absolute. The solemnity is maximal: one oath, by God's holiness, irreversible.
37. The throne is compared to the sun (*ka-shemesh*) — the most permanent, visible, daily-reliable object in creation. As surely as the sun rises, David's throne endures. The phrase *negdi* ('before Me, in My sight') means God personally witnesses and maintains the throne's permanence. The sun comparison will make the lament's devastation more acute: has the sun gone dark?

- 38.** The moon (yareach) joins the sun as a cosmic guarantee. The phrase *ed ba-shachaq ne'eman* ('a faithful witness in the sky') makes the moon a witness — a *ne'eman* (from *aman*, the root of *emunah*) that testifies nightly to God's covenant commitment. Every moonrise is covenant evidence. *Selah* marks the end of the covenant section and the transition to the lament.
- 39.** The shift from covenant celebration to accusatory lament is the most dramatic tonal reversal in the Psalter. The word 'But' (*ve-attah*) carries the weight of centuries of shattered expectation. Everything God promised in verses 4-38 is contradicted by what the psalmist now describes.
- 40.** The verb *ne'arta* ('You have renounced, You have abhorred') from *na'ar* means to shake off, to reject with disgust. The *berit* ('covenant') that God swore He would not violate (v. 35) has been — according to the psalmist — renounced. And *chillalta la-arets nizro* ('You have profaned his crown to the ground') — the verb *chillal* ('profane, desecrate') is the same word used in verses 32 and 35 about violating covenants. God accused the children of profaning His statutes; now the psalmist accuses God of profaning the crown. The *nezer* ('crown, diadem, consecration') — the symbol of royal anointing — lies in the dirt.
- 41.** The verb *paratsta* ('You broke through') from *parats* means to breach — the walls God was supposed to defend, God has torn open. The word *mechittah* ('ruin, destruction, terror') describes the fortresses reduced to rubble. The God who promised 'no enemy will deceive him' (v. 23) has Himself become the one who breaches the defenses.
- 42.** The plundering is public — *kol ovrei derekh* ('all who pass by on the road') can raid at will. And the *cherpah* ('reproach, disgrace, shame') is social — the neighbors who once respected now mock. The Davidic king has become a roadside spectacle, an object of contempt.
- 43.** The irony is exact: in verse 14, God's right hand was exalted; in verse 18, God lifted Israel's horn. Now God raises the right hand of the enemy. God's power, which was directed toward David, is now redirecting toward David's destroyers. The verb *hismachta* ('You made rejoice') means God gave the enemies joy — the same God who was supposed to give David joy.
- 44.** The *tsur charbo* ('edge/rock of his sword') is dulled or turned back — the weapon is useless. And *lo haqemoto ba-milchamah* ('You have not made him stand in battle') — the verb *haqam* ('to cause to stand') is the opposite of what God promised. The warrior God chose (v. 20) cannot stand because God will not hold him up.
- 45.** The word *miteharo* ('his splendor, his purity, his brightness') from *taher* may refer to the radiance of the royal office. God has extinguished it. And the throne (*kisse*) that was supposed to endure like the sun and moon (vv. 37-38) has been cast *la-arets* ('to the ground'). The cosmic permanence promised in the covenant section is violently contradicted by the earthward motion of the lament.
- 46.** The verb *hiqtsarta* ('You shortened') from *qatsar* means to cut off, to truncate. The days of youth (*yemei alumav*) — the prime of life — are abbreviated by God's hand. And *he'etita alav bushah* ('You covered him with shame') — the verb *ata* means to wrap, to clothe. Shame is worn like a garment. The king who was clothed with royal splendor is now wrapped in disgrace. *Selah*.
- 47.** The cry *ad mah* ('how long?') echoes Psalm 82:2 and dozens of other laments — it is the universal question of the sufferer. The verb *tissater* ('You hide Yourself') from *satar* is the hidden face of God — the same terror as Psalm 88:15. And *tiv'ar kemo esh chamatekha* ('will Your wrath burn like fire?') — the fire of God's anger was supposed to burn against David's enemies (v. 24), not against David himself.
- 48.** The word *cheled* ('duration, lifespan, world') emphasizes brevity — life is short, and the psalmist feels its shortness acutely. The word *shav* ('futility, emptiness, vanity') — the same word as in the third commandment ('You shall not take the LORD's name in vain') — asks whether human existence itself is pointless. The question borders on the despair of Ecclesiastes: if the covenant is broken, what is the purpose of life?
- 49.** The rhetorical question expects the answer 'no one.' The word *gever* ('man, strong one') echoes Job 3:3 and emphasizes that even the mighty die. The phrase *mi-yad she'ol* ('from the hand of Sheol') personifies death as a grasping power. No human can pry open death's grip. The psalmist's argument is that death is coming and the covenant promises must be fulfilled before it arrives.
- 50.** This verse is the psalm's climax — the question that the entire poem has been building toward. The seven occurrences of *chesed* in this psalm (see note on v. 2) reach their crisis here: *chesed* was celebrated, promised, sworn, and pledged — and now the psalmist demands to know where it has gone. The psalm does not answer the question. It leaves it hanging.
- 51.** The verb *zekhor* ('remember') is the final plea — the psalmist asks God to take notice of the *cherpah* ('disgrace, reproach') that God's own servants bear. The phrase *se'eti be-cheqi* ('I bear in my chest/bosom') means the mockery is internalized, carried inside the body like a physical burden. The 'many peoples' (*rabbim ammim*) are the nations who mock both the king and the God he serves.
- 52.** The psalm ends without resolution — no doxology of praise, no turning point, no answered prayer. This is deliberate and canonical: the editors of the Psalter placed this unresolved cry at the end of Book III, followed by the doxology of verse 53 and then Moses's Psalm 90, which addresses the crisis of divine wrath and human mortality from a different angle. The arrangement implies that Psalm 89's question finds its response not within the psalm but in the larger canonical structure.
- 53.** This doxology is not part of Psalm 89 but a liturgical formula closing Book III of the Psalter (cf. Psalm 41:14 closing Book I, 72:18-19 closing Book II, 106:48 closing Book IV). The double *amen* ('let it be firm, let it be established') — from *aman*, the root of *emunah* — is a communal response of affirmation. The congregation says 'amen' to God's faithfulness even after a psalm that questions it. The doxology does not answer the psalm's questions; it affirms that the conversation with God continues.

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Summary: *The psalm attributed to Moses — the only psalm bearing his name — and the opening of Book IV of the Psalter. It meditates on the eternal nature of God set against the crushing brevity of human life. Before the mountains existed, God was already God. Human beings are like grass that sprouts in the morning and withers by evening. The psalm traces this brevity to God's anger against sin: human days are consumed in divine wrath, and even seventy or eighty years pass like a sigh. The psalm closes with two petitions: teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom, and let the favor of the Lord rest upon us so that the work of our hands will endure.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This psalm answers the crisis of Psalm 89. Book III ended with the Davidic covenant apparently shattered, the anointed one mocked, and the question 'Where is Your former faithful love?' hanging unanswered. Book IV opens with Moses — not David — and redirects the theological gaze from the Davidic dynasty to the eternal God who existed before any dynasty, any monarchy, any temple. The psalm's strategy is radical: instead of defending the Davidic covenant, it leaps behind it to the God who was a dwelling place 'in generation after generation,' long before David was born. If the Davidic institution has failed, God has not — because God precedes all institutions. The famous prayer 'teach us to number our days' is not gentle pastoral advice; it is the hard-won wisdom of a man who watched an entire generation die in the wilderness because of God's anger. Moses knew something about numbered days.*

Translation Friction: *The attribution to Moses makes this potentially the oldest psalm in the Psalter — and the oldest poem in the Hebrew Bible after the Song of the Sea (Exodus 15). Some scholars accept the attribution as plausible; others see it as a later ascription meant to ground Book IV's theology in Mosaic authority. The phrase 'a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday' (v. 4) has influenced theological reflection on divine timelessness from Augustine to Einstein. The psalm's unflinching focus on death and divine wrath — without the redemptive turn most psalms provide — makes it one of the most sobering texts in Scripture.*

Connections: *The opening line ('Lord, You have been our dwelling place') connects to Deuteronomy 33:27 ('The eternal God is your dwelling place'). The grass metaphor (vv. 5-6) is developed in Isaiah 40:6-8 ('All flesh is grass'). The seventy-eighty years of verse 10 became the standard biblical lifespan measure. The petition 'teach us to number our days' (v. 12) influenced Ecclesiastes' entire meditation on time and wisdom. Moses' placement at the head of Book IV (Psalms 90-106) reframes the Psalter: after the Davidic crisis of Psalm 89, the response is to return to the God who preceded David, preceded the monarchy, preceded even the conquest — the eternal God who was dwelling place before any earthly dwelling existed.*

¹A prayer of Moses, the man of God.

O Lord, You have been our dwelling place
in generation after generation.

²Before the mountains were born,
before You labored to bring forth the earth and the world,
from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.

³You turn mortals back to dust
and say, 'Return, children of Adam.'

⁴For a thousand years in Your sight
are like yesterday when it passes,
like a watch in the night.

⁵You sweep them away like a flood; they become like sleep.
In the morning they are like grass that springs up —

⁶in the morning it blooms and springs up;
by evening it withers and dries up.

⁷For we are consumed by Your anger
and terrified by Your wrath.

⁸You have set our guilty deeds before You,
our hidden sins in the light of Your face.

⁹For all our days decline under Your fury;
we finish our years like a sigh.

¹⁰The days of our years — among them, seventy years,
or if by strength, eighty years.
Yet their pride is only toil and trouble,
for it passes quickly and we fly away.

¹¹Who understands the power of Your anger?
Your wrath matches the fear that is due You.

¹²Teach us to number our days,
so that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

¹³Return, O LORD! How long?
Have compassion on Your servants.

¹⁴Satisfy us in the morning with Your faithful love,
so that we may shout for joy and be glad all our days.

¹⁵Make us glad for as many days as You have afflicted us,
for as many years as we have seen trouble.

¹⁶Let Your work be revealed to Your servants
and Your splendor to their children.

¹⁷Let the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us.
Establish the work of our hands for us —
yes, establish the work of our hands.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Some manuscripts read me'onah ('refuge, habitation') instead of ma'on; the Septuagint reads kataphyge ('refuge'). The meaning is essentially the same: God is the place where His people live. The phrase be-dor va-dor ('in generation after generation') spans all of human history — every generation has found its home in God, including the wilderness generation that died under God's displeasure.
2. The birth language (yulladu, techolel) for creation is found also in Proverbs 8:24-25, where Wisdom was brought forth before the mountains. The image of God laboring to bring forth the world is rare and intimate — creation is not effortless speech (as in Genesis 1) but costly, physical work. Moses may be drawing on a different creation tradition.
3. The verb shuvu can mean 'return' (go back to dust) or 'repent' (turn back to God). Some interpreters read both meanings simultaneously: God commands both physical return to dust and spiritual return to Himself. The ambiguity may be deliberate — the psalm holds death and repentance in the same breath.
4. This verse became the basis for 2 Peter 3:8 ('With the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day'). The psalm's point is not mathematical equivalence but experiential incommensurability: divine time and human time are so different that comparison barely works. A thousand years — roughly forty human generations — is a single night shift to God.

5. The verb *zeramtam* ('You sweep them away') from *zaram* means to pour out, to wash away in a torrent — human lives are carried off like debris in a flash flood. Then the comparison shifts: *shenah yihyu* ('they become like sleep') — life is as insubstantial as a dream. The morning brings the grass metaphor: *ke-chatsir yachalof* ('like grass that changes/passes'). The verb *chalaf* ('to pass by, to change, to spring up') captures the grass's rapid cycle from growth to death.
6. The verb *yatsits* ('it blooms, it blossoms') from *tsuts* means to flower — the grass reaches its peak of beauty. And *chalaf* ('it passes, it renews') captures the brief moment of flourishing. Then *la-erev* ('by evening') — the same day, not the next — *yemolel ve-yavesh* ('it withers and dries up'). The verb *molel* means to wilt, to become limp; *yavesh* means to be completely dry, dead. Morning to evening: a single day contains the entire arc of a human life. The compression is brutal.
7. The verb *khalinu* ('we are consumed, we are finished') from *kalah* means to be used up, exhausted, spent. And *nivhalnu* ('we are terrified, we are thrown into panic') from *bahal* describes the fear that paralyzes. The cause of human brevity is not mere biology but divine anger (*af*, 'nostril/anger') and *chametekha* ('Your wrath/heat'). Moses does not explain why God is angry — he simply states that human mortality is the result of divine displeasure.
8. The 'light of Your face' (*me'or panekha*) is the same divine countenance that blesses in Numbers 6:25 ('The LORD make His face shine upon you'). Here, the shining face is not blessing but exposure — the same light that bestows favor also reveals guilt. The dual function of God's face (grace and judgment) is a central tension in Hebrew theology.
9. The verb *panu* ('they turn away, they decline') from *panah* describes the days turning their face away — departing, leaving. The word *evratekha* ('Your fury, Your overflowing wrath') from *avar* means anger that overflows its container. And the final comparison: *killinu shanenu kemo hegeh* ('we finish our years like a sigh'). The word *hegeh* can mean 'a sigh, a murmur, a muttering, a growl.' An entire lifetime reduced to a single exhalation. The years do not end with a bang but with a breath that dissipates into air.
10. The seventy/eighty year span became the standard measure of a full life in Jewish tradition. Moses himself lived 120 years (Deuteronomy 34:7), well beyond this range. The psalm may reflect the normal rather than the exceptional lifespan. The word *aven* ('trouble, sorrow, wickedness, nothingness') carries moral weight — life's best achievements are tainted by futility. This anticipates Ecclesiastes' verdict: *hevel* ('vapor').
11. The rhetorical question *mi yodea oz appekha* ('who knows the strength of Your anger?') implies that no one fully comprehends how powerful God's displeasure is. The second line — *u-khe-yir'atkha evratekha* ('and according to Your fear is Your wrath') — means God's anger is proportional to the reverence He deserves. Since God deserves infinite reverence, His anger is immeasurable. The verse is a bridge between the description of mortality (vv. 3-10) and the petition for wisdom (v. 12): only someone who grasps the magnitude of divine anger will pray for wisdom.
12. The phrase *levav chokhmah* ('a heart of wisdom') places wisdom in the heart (*levav*), the Hebrew seat of will and decision. Wisdom is not intellectual knowledge but existential orientation — a way of living that accounts for the fact that life is brief, God is eternal, and the gap between them demands humility. This verse is the theological foundation for the entire wisdom tradition.
13. The verb *shuvah* ('return') — the same verb God used to command humanity back to dust (v. 3) — is now directed at God. Turn back. Come back. The phrase *ad matai* ('how long?') is the universal lament question. And *hinnachem al avadekha* ('have compassion on Your servants') — the verb *nacham* (Niphal) means to relent, to be grieved, to change course. Moses asks God to feel differently about His servants — not to withdraw the reality of death but to show kindness within it.
14. The word *chesed* appears here for the first time in the psalm — after twelve verses of mortality, anger, and judgment, faithful love finally enters. Its placement is deliberate: *chesed* does not deny the reality of death but transforms the experience of the numbered days. The petition is not for longer life but for a fuller one.
15. The petition asks for proportional compensation: *ki-mot innitanu* ('according to the days You afflicted us'). The years of suffering should be balanced by years of joy. The request is not for painless life but for redemptive proportion — the joy should match the suffering in duration. Moses, who spent forty years watching a generation die in the wilderness, would have calculated the debt precisely.
16. The verb *yera'eh* ('let it be seen, let it appear') asks for visible evidence of God's activity. The word *po'olekha* ('Your work, Your deed') is what God is currently doing — the servants need to see it. And *hadarekha* ('Your splendor, Your majesty') is directed *al beneihem* ('upon their children') — the next generation should inherit not suffering but glory. The petition is intergenerational: let the parents see God's work and the children see God's beauty.
17. The double petition ('establish the work of our hands... establish the work of our hands') is one of only a few instances of verbatim repetition in the Psalter. The repetition functions as intensification: this is the prayer's final, urgent, concentrated plea. All the theology of the psalm — divine eternity, human brevity, anger, wisdom, *chesed* — converges on this single request: let our brief lives produce something that endures. The answer, the psalm implies, is not in human effort but in divine establishment.

91

Summary: *Psalm 91 is a psalm of divine protection, addressed to one who has chosen to dwell in the presence of the Most High. It moves from a general declaration of trust (vv. 1-2) to specific promises of deliverance from danger — plague, warfare, wild beasts, demonic threat — and culminates in a divine oracle spoken in God's own voice (vv. 14-16). The psalm has no superscription in the Hebrew text, making its authorship anonymous.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This psalm operates on the razor's edge between promise and presumption. It declares with absolute confidence that the one who shelters in God will not be harmed — no plague will touch his tent, no stone will bruise his foot. Yet the Hebrew Bible itself contains stories of righteous people who suffered terribly (Job, Jeremiah, the Servant of Isaiah 53). The psalm does not resolve this tension; it simply declares the promise without qualification. The divine oracle in verses 14-16 shifts the psalm from human testimony to God's own speech — 'Because he clings to me, I will deliver him' — which grounds the protection not in a magical formula but in the quality of relationship. The key verb is chashaq ('to cling, to desire'), which describes passionate attachment, not casual belief.*

Translation Friction: *The LXX attributes this psalm to David, but the Hebrew text is untitled. The phrase yalinkha be-ever'ato ('he will cover you with his pinion') uses avian imagery for God — feathers, wings — which is metaphorical, not literal, but carries deep resonance from Deuteronomy 32:11 where God is compared to an eagle hovering over its young. The 'terror of night' (pachad laylah) and 'arrow that flies by day' (chets ya'uf yomam) in verse 5 likely refer to both literal military danger and the ancient Near Eastern belief in demonic forces active at specific times. The psalm's promise of angelic protection (v. 11-12) was famously cited in the temptation narrative of Matthew 4:6, where it is used to test whether divine promise can be turned into divine demand.*

Connections: *The opening phrase yoshev be-seter Elyon ('he who dwells in the shelter of the Most High') connects to the temple theology of Psalms 27:5 and 31:20, where God's 'shelter' (seter) is the sacred space of divine presence. The four divine names in verses 1-2 — Elyon ('Most High'), Shaddai ('the Almighty'), YHWH, and Elohim — concentrate more names for God in two verses than almost any other passage in the Psalter. The promise of long life in verse 16 echoes the covenant blessings of Deuteronomy 30:20. The angelic guardianship of verses 11-12 has no parallel in the Hebrew Bible of this specificity — angels carrying the righteous lest they stumble — making this one of the most developed angelology texts in the Old Testament.*

¹He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

²I say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress,
my God — in him I trust."

³For he will rescue you from the fowler's snare,
from the destructive plague.

⁴With his pinion he will cover you,
and under his wings you will find refuge.
His faithfulness is a shield and a wall.

⁵You will not fear the terror of the night,
nor the arrow that flies by day,

⁶nor the plague that stalks in darkness,
nor the devastation that ravages at noon.

⁷A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand —
but it will not come near you.

⁸You will only look with your eyes
and see the repayment of the wicked.

⁹Because you have made the LORD your refuge,
the Most High your dwelling place,

¹⁰no harm will befall you,
and no affliction will come near your tent.

¹¹For he will command his angels concerning you,
to guard you in all your ways.

¹²On their hands they will carry you,
so your foot does not strike a stone.

¹³You will tread on the lion and the cobra;
you will trample the young lion and the serpent.

¹⁴"Because he clings to me, I will deliver him;
I will set him on high, because he knows my name."

¹⁵"He will call on me and I will answer him;
I am with him in trouble.
I will rescue him and honor him."

¹⁶"With length of days I will satisfy him
and show him my salvation."

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The four divine names in verses 1-2 (Elyon, Shaddai, YHWH, Elohay) are not synonyms used for poetic variety alone. Each name carries distinct theological weight: Elyon stresses cosmic supremacy, Shaddai stresses might, YHWH is the covenant name, and Elohay ('my God') is the personal possessive. Together they present the full identity of the God who protects.
2. The word *seter* ('shelter, hiding place') is related to the verb *satar* ('to hide, to conceal'). In the Psalter it often refers to the protective presence of God experienced in worship (Psalm 27:5, 31:21). This is not physical architecture but relational proximity.
3. The shift to first person (*omar*, 'I say') makes this a personal confession. The two metaphors — *machasi* ('my refuge,' a place one flees to for safety) and *metsudati* ('my fortress,' a fortified stronghold) — move from flight to standing ground. The final phrase *evtach bo* ('I trust in him') uses *batach*, one of the primary Hebrew verbs for trust, which implies leaning one's full weight on something.
4. The *pach yaqush* ('fowler's snare') is a bird-trap, a concealed device designed to catch the unsuspecting. It serves as a metaphor for hidden danger — traps set by enemies or circumstances one cannot foresee. The *dever havvot* ('plague of destruction') pairs disease with ruin. The two images cover covert danger (the trap) and overt catastrophe (the plague), suggesting comprehensive protection.
5. The word *amitto* ('his truth/faithfulness') is from *emet*, one of the foundational attributes of God in the Hebrew Bible. Here it is rendered 'faithfulness' because the context is protection — God's reliability is what shields the believer. The image of God as a bird appears in Deuteronomy 32:11 (eagle) and Ruth 2:12 (wings of the LORD), always in the context of protective care.
6. The *pachad laylah* ('terror of night') and *chets ya'uf yomam* ('arrow that flies by day') form the first half of a four-part catalogue of dangers spanning night and day, darkness and light. The 'terror of night' likely encompasses both literal raids (night attacks were common in ancient warfare) and the ancient Near Eastern belief in malevolent spiritual forces active after dark. The 'arrow by day' refers to open warfare. Together the pair says: no time of day holds any threat for the sheltered one.

6. The dever ba-ofel yahalokh ('plague that walks in darkness') personifies disease as a predator moving through the night. The qetev yashud tsohorayim ('devastation that ravages at noon') is more mysterious — qetev is a rare word possibly connected to a demonic figure in ancient tradition. The Targum and rabbinic sources identify qetev with a specific demon active during the hottest hours. Whether the psalmist intended literal demonology or vivid personification, the effect is the same: destruction has been given legs and agency, and it still cannot reach the one sheltered in God.
7. The escalation from elef ('a thousand') to revavah ('ten thousand') is a standard Hebrew intensification device. The image is of a battlefield where devastation surrounds the protected one on every side. The promise is extraordinary in its absoluteness: eleikha lo yiggash ('to you it will not draw near'). The psalm does not say 'you may survive' but 'it will not touch you.' This kind of unqualified promise is characteristic of psalms of trust and should be read as an expression of faith's posture, not a contractual guarantee.
8. The word shillumat ('repayment, recompense') from the root sh-l-m ('to be complete, to repay') implies that the wicked receive what their actions earned. The protected one will witness this — not participate in it, not be caught in it — only observe it. The verse assumes a moral order in which wickedness meets its consequence and righteousness is vindicated by survival.
9. The verse returns to the language of verse 1-2, creating a frame: machsi ('my refuge') echoes verse 2 and me'onekha ('your dwelling place') echoes the yoshev ('dwells') of verse 1. The word ma'on ('dwelling place, habitation') is used of God's heavenly abode in Deuteronomy 26:15 — here, remarkably, God becomes the dwelling place of the human rather than the reverse.
10. The word nega ('affliction, plague, stroke') is the same word used for the plagues of Egypt and for skin diseases in Leviticus 13-14. The ohalekha ('your tent') evokes nomadic life and also the tabernacle tradition — the tent is both home and sacred space. The promise is that the protected zone extends to one's entire household.
11. This verse and the next were cited in the temptation narrative (Matthew 4:6, Luke 4:10-11) as a test of whether divine promise can be leveraged into divine demand. The original psalm context is one of trust, not manipulation — the angels are sent because of the relationship described in verses 1-2, not because the individual demands them.
12. The image is of literal carrying — al kappayim yissa'unkna ('on their palms they will lift you up'). The danger averted is modest: stumbling on a stone. After the grand threats of plague, arrows, and thousands falling, the psalm descends to the smallest hazard — a stone on the path — and declares that even this is covered. The progression from cosmic danger to minor stumbling suggests that divine care operates at every scale.
13. Four dangerous creatures appear: shachal ('lion,' possibly a specific species), peten ('cobra,' the Egyptian cobra or asp), kefir ('young lion,' in its prime strength), and tannin ('serpent, dragon, sea creature'). The verb tidrakh ('you will tread') and tirmos ('you will trample') are verbs of dominion — walking on top of lethal predators. The imagery evokes Genesis 3:15 (crushing the serpent's head) and the ancient Near Eastern motif of the victorious king treading on enemies. The protected one does not merely survive these threats but exercises authority over them.
14. The divine oracle in verses 14-16 is the theological key to the entire psalm. The protection promised in verses 1-13 is not automatic or formulaic — it is grounded in the quality of relationship described here. The verbs chashaq ('to cling') and yada ('to know') describe a bond of passion and intimacy that precedes and produces the protection. Without this relationship, the promises become mere magic.
15. The sequence is precise: yiqra'eni ('he will call on me') — ve-e'enehu ('and I will answer him') — immo anokhi ve-tsarah ('I am with him in distress') — achaltsehu ('I will rescue him') — va-akhabbdehu ('and I will honor him'). Note that God does not promise absence of trouble (tsarah) but presence within it: 'I am with him in trouble.' The psalm has not contradicted itself — verses 3-13 describe protection from external attack, but verse 15 acknowledges that distress still comes, and God's response is companionship followed by deliverance.
16. The final promise is twofold: orekh yamim ('length of days,' a long and full life) and yeshu'ati ('my salvation'). The verb asbi'ehu ('I will satisfy him') is from sava ('to be sated, filled to contentment'). The promise is not mere survival but satisfaction — a life that feels complete. The final word, yeshu'ati ('my salvation'), places the psalm's conclusion in the vocabulary of God's saving acts. The root y-sh-a ('to save, to deliver') is the most comprehensive term for divine rescue in the Hebrew Bible. God's final word is not protection but revelation: 'I will show him my salvation' — the ultimate gift is not safety but sight.

92

Summary: Psalm 92 is the only psalm in the Hebrew Psalter explicitly designated 'A Song for the Sabbath Day' (mizmor shir le-yom ha-shabbat). It is a thanksgiving hymn celebrating God's works, the depth of divine thought, and the contrasting fates of the righteous and the wicked. The psalm moves from praise (vv. 1-4) to reflection on God's inscrutable designs (vv. 5-9) to personal triumph (vv. 10-11) to the flourishing of the righteous in old age (vv. 12-16).

What Makes This Remarkable: The Sabbath superscription raises a profound question: why this psalm for Sabbath? It contains no mention of rest, creation, or the seventh day. The Mishnah (Tamid 7:4) assigns it to Sabbath because the rabbis understood it as a song for 'the world to come' — the eternal Sabbath, the age of final rest. If so, the psalm is eschatological: it describes the reality that will prevail when God's

work is fully visible. The wicked will have vanished like grass (v. 7), the righteous will flourish like cedars (v. 12), and God's justice will be self-evident. The Sabbath is a weekly rehearsal of that future reality.

*Translation Friction: Verse 1 in the Hebrew text is the superscription (mizmor shir le-yom ha-shabbat), which the WLC counts as verse 1. English Bibles typically begin the content at verse 1, creating a one-verse offset. We follow Hebrew versification throughout. The phrase *beli avar* ('without injustice,' v. 16) in the final verse is theologically charged — declaring that there is 'no unrighteousness' in God — a statement that the book of Job spends 42 chapters interrogating.*

*Connections: The Sabbath assignment connects this psalm to Genesis 2:2-3 and Exodus 20:8-11, where Sabbath commemorates creation completed. The tree imagery in verses 13-14 ('planted in the house of the LORD') echoes Psalm 1:3 (the righteous as a tree by water) and Jeremiah 17:8. The phrase *ma gadlu ma'asekha* ('how great are your works,' v. 6) resonates with Psalm 104:24 and Psalm 111:2, where the immensity of God's works overwhelms human comprehension.*

¹A psalm — a song composed for the Sabbath day.

²It is good to give thanks to the LORD,
to sing praise to your name, O Most High,

³to declare your faithful love in the morning
and your faithfulness through the nights,

⁴with the ten-stringed instrument and the lute,
with the murmuring melody of the lyre.

⁵For you have made me glad by your work, O LORD;
at the works of your hands I shout for joy.

⁶How great are your works, O LORD!
How profoundly deep are your thoughts!

⁷A senseless person does not know this;
a fool cannot understand it.

⁸When the wicked sprout like grass
and all evildoers flourish —
it is only to be destroyed forever.

⁹But you, O LORD, are exalted forever.

¹⁰For look — your enemies, O LORD,
for look — your enemies will perish;
all evildoers will be scattered.

¹¹But you have raised my horn like that of the wild ox;
I am drenched with fresh oil.

¹²My eye has looked on those who watch me;
my ears have heard the fate of the evildoers rising against me.

¹³The righteous will flourish like a palm tree;
like a cedar in Lebanon, they will grow tall.

¹⁴Planted in the house of the LORD,
they will flourish in the courts of our God.

¹⁵They will still bear fruit in old age;
they will be full of sap and green,

¹⁶to declare that the LORD is upright —
my rock, in whom there is no injustice.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. This is the only psalm in the entire Psalter with a Sabbath designation. The Levites sang it during the Sabbath morning offering in the Second Temple period (Mishnah Tamid 7:4). The double genre label *mizmor shir* ('psalm' and 'song') may distinguish instrumental accompaniment (*mizmor*, from *z-m-r*, 'to pluck strings') from vocal performance (*shir*, 'song').
2. The psalm opens with a declaration about the nature of thanksgiving itself: *tov lehodot* ('it is good to give thanks'). The word *tov* ('good') is the same word God uses to evaluate creation in Genesis 1. Giving thanks is not merely appropriate — it is good in the creational sense, part of the order of things. The address to Elyon ('Most High') connects to Psalm 91:1.
3. The preposition *ba-leilot* ('in the nights,' plural) suggests every night, not a single night. The daily rhythm of declaring *chesed* at dawn and *emunah* at dusk turns all of life into worship.
4. Three instruments appear: the *asor* ('ten-stringed instrument'), the *nevel* ('lute' or 'harp,' a large stringed instrument), and the *kinnor* ('lyre,' David's instrument). The word *higgayon* ('murmuring, meditation, soft playing') suggests a quiet, contemplative musical interlude — the lyre provides a meditative background. This verse indicates that Sabbath worship in ancient Israel was richly musical.
5. The verb *simachtani* ('you have made me glad') attributes the psalmist's joy to God's initiative — God's work produces gladness. The word *po'olekha* ('your work,' singular) and *ma'asei yadekha* ('works of your hands,' plural) may distinguish between God's single grand design and its many visible expressions. The verb *arannein* ('I shout for joy') is a verb of exuberant, audible celebration — not quiet contentment but vocal triumph.
6. The juxtaposition of 'works' (visible) and 'thoughts' (invisible) is deliberate. Humans can see God's works but cannot plumb his thoughts. The psalm celebrates both — the grandeur of what is visible and the mystery of what is not.
7. The *ish ba'ar* ('brutish person,' literally 'one who is like an animal') and *kesil* ('fool,' a key term in Proverbs for the morally obtuse) cannot grasp what verse 6 declares. The pronoun *zot* ('this') refers to the depth of God's thoughts and the moral order they produce. The fool looks at the prosperity of the wicked (next verse) and concludes that there is no justice. The wise person sees the same evidence and trusts the depth they cannot fathom.
8. The grass metaphor for transient human life recurs throughout the Hebrew Bible (Isaiah 40:6-8, Psalm 103:15-16). Here it is applied specifically to the wicked: their success is real but temporary, like vegetation in a Palestinian summer that appears after rain and scorches within weeks.
9. This short, emphatic verse stands at the structural center of the psalm. While the wicked rise and fall, God remains *marom le-olam* ('exalted forever'). The word *marom* ('height, exalted place') is related to Elyon ('Most High') in verse 2. The contrast is total: grass-like transience versus eternal elevation. The brevity of the verse — only five Hebrew words — mirrors its content: God's permanence needs no elaboration.
10. The repetition *ki hinneh oyvekha YHWH, ki hinneh oyvekha* ('for look, your enemies, O LORD, for look, your enemies') is a rhetorical device called staircase parallelism — the line builds by repeating and extending. The same structure appears in Ugaritic poetry (the Baal Cycle), suggesting deep roots in Canaanite literary tradition. The verb *yitpardu* ('they will be scattered') describes the dissolution of a unified force — the evildoers will be dispersed and broken apart.
11. The *re'em* ('wild ox,' not 'unicorn' as the KJV renders from the LXX *monokeros*) was a massive, powerful bovine — likely the now-extinct aurochs. Its horn symbolized strength and victory. The verb *vattarem* ('you have raised') means God has elevated the psalmist's power and status. The *balloti be-shemen ra'anani* ('I am drenched with fresh oil') refers to anointing with fine oil — a sign of honor, health, and divine favor. The shift from the destruction of enemies to personal exaltation is characteristic of thanksgiving psalms.
12. The verse is compressed and somewhat cryptic. The verb *vattabbet* ('it has looked') combined with *be-shurai* ('on those who watch me / on my foes') suggests the psalmist has witnessed the downfall of adversaries. The parallel — 'my ears have heard' concerning *mere'im* ('evildoers') — indicates that reports of their destruction have reached the psalmist. The verse is deliberately restrained: it does not describe what the eye saw or the ear heard, leaving the specifics to the reader's imagination.
13. The verb *yifrach* ('will flourish') is the same verb used for the wicked in verse 8 (*bifroach*, 'when they sprout'). The identical verb applied to grass and to palm trees produces an ironic contrast: the same 'flourishing' that leads to destruction for the wicked leads to grandeur for the righteous.
14. The word *shetulim* ('planted') is a passive participle — these trees did not plant themselves. God planted them. The location is *be-veit YHWH* ('in the house of the LORD') and *be-chatsrot Eloheinu* ('in the courts of our God'). The image of trees growing in the temple courts was not merely metaphorical — ancient Near Eastern temples often featured sacred gardens. But the deeper meaning is that rootedness in worship is what produces flourishing. The righteous are planted people — grounded, established, located in the place of God's presence.

15. The word *be-seivah* ('in old age, in gray-headedness') introduces a remarkable promise: the righteous do not decline with age but continue to produce. The verbs *yenuvun* ('they will bear fruit') and the adjectives *desheinim* ('full of sap, lush') and *ra'ananim* ('green, fresh, moist') describe vitality that defies the normal course of aging. This is not a literal promise that the righteous will never grow old, but a declaration that a life rooted in God retains its capacity to produce meaning, wisdom, and goodness to the end.
16. The psalm ends with a creedal declaration: *yashar YHWH* ('the LORD is upright'). The word *yashar* ('straight, upright, just') applies to God the same moral standard used for humans — God practices what he requires. The title *turi* ('my rock') is one of the most enduring divine metaphors — rock as stability, permanence, and unshakable foundation. The final phrase *velo avlatah bo* ('and there is no injustice in him') uses *avlah* ('injustice, wrongdoing, crookedness'), the opposite of *yashar*. The psalm's final word is an assertion of God's total moral integrity — a fitting end for a Sabbath song that trusts God's long-term justice even when short-term evidence seems ambiguous.

93

Summary: *Psalm 93 is the first of the 'YHWH reigns' psalms (93, 95-99) that celebrate God's kingship over creation. In only five compact verses, it declares God's sovereignty, describes the chaotic waters rising against his throne, and affirms his eternal decrees. The psalm has no superscription.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This is one of the shortest psalms in the Psalter, yet it packs enormous theological weight into its five verses. The opening declaration YHWH malakh ('the LORD reigns') was likely a liturgical shout — a coronation cry for the divine king. The central image is a battle between God's throne and the chaotic waters (*neharot*, 'rivers/floods') that pound and crash with enormous force. In ancient Near Eastern mythology, the primordial waters represented chaos, the anti-creation force that God defeated to establish the ordered world. The psalm does not tell the story of that battle — it simply declares its outcome: God's throne is established, the waters are loud but powerless, and his decrees stand forever.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase YHWH malakh can be translated either 'the LORD reigns' (a timeless statement) or 'the LORD has become king' (an event, a coronation). This translation question has generated enormous scholarly debate. Sigmund Mowinckel proposed an annual enthronement festival where God was ritually acclaimed as king; others argue the verb is simply stative ('the LORD is king'). We render it 'the LORD reigns' to capture the timeless sovereignty the psalm describes. The 'floods' (*neharot*) in verses 3-4 carry mythological resonance from Canaanite literature, where the sea-god Yamm challenged Baal for kingship. Israel's psalmists borrowed the imagery but redirected it: YHWH, not Baal, is the one who tames the waters.*

Connections: *The 'YHWH reigns' declaration connects to Psalms 96:10, 97:1, and 99:1, forming a literary cluster of enthronement psalms. The chaotic waters imagery draws from Genesis 1:2 (*tehom*, 'the deep'), Psalm 29:3 ('the voice of the LORD is over the waters'), and the exodus narrative where God divided the sea. The final verse's reference to God's *edot* ('testimonies, decrees') planted in his house connects to the ark of the covenant theology where God's commands reside in the sanctuary.*

¹The LORD reigns! He is robed in majesty.
The LORD is robed — he has girded himself with strength.
The world is established; it cannot be shaken.

²Your throne is established from of old;
you are from everlasting.

³The floods have risen, O LORD,
the floods have raised their voice;
the floods raise their crashing waves.

⁴Above the thunder of great waters,
mightier than the breakers of the sea —

the LORD on high is mighty!

5Your decrees stand utterly firm.
Holiness adorns your house,
O LORD, for all the length of days.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The repetition of laves (‘robed’) is intentional — Hebrew uses repetition for emphasis, not redundancy. God’s clothing in majesty and girding in strength are not two separate acts but one reality described from two angles: the visible splendor (majesty) and the operative power (strength).
2. The verse makes two temporal claims: God’s throne is *nakhon me-az* (‘established from then,’ from the beginning of time), and God himself is *me-olam* (‘from everlasting,’ beyond all time). The throne has a beginning — ‘from of old’ — but God does not: he is ‘from everlasting.’ The distinction is subtle but profound: the throne was established at some point in the unrecoverable past, but the one who sits on it predates even that.
3. The word *dokhyam* is rare and difficult. It likely derives from *d-k-h* (‘to crush, to pound’) and refers to the pounding or crashing of waves. Some scholars connect it to *dakhi* (‘crushing, breaking’). The image is of waves smashing themselves against the divine throne — furious, loud, and ultimately impotent.
4. The verse resolves the tension of verse 3 in a single declaration. The structure moves from the threat (*qolot mayim rabbim*, ‘the thunder of great waters’; *addirim mishberei yam*, ‘mighty breakers of the sea’) to the resolution: *addir ba-marom YHWH* (‘mighty on high is the LORD’). The word *addir* (‘mighty, majestic, noble’) is applied first to the waves and then to God — the waves are mighty, but God is mightier. The phrase *ba-marom* (‘on high, in the heights’) echoes the *marom* of verse 1 (through *ge’ut*) and places God above the fray. He does not struggle against the waters; he towers over them.
5. The psalm ends by moving from cosmic power to covenantal order. The *edotekha* (‘your decrees, your testimonies’) are God’s revealed instructions — the same word used for the tablets of the covenant (*edut*). They *ne’emnu me’od* (‘are exceedingly firm, trustworthy, established’), from the root *a-m-n*, the same root as *emunah* (‘faithfulness’) and *amen*. The second line shifts to the temple: *le-veitkha na’avah qodesh* (‘holiness adorns your house’). The word *na’avah* (‘is fitting, adorns, is beautiful’) says that holiness is not imposed on God’s house but belongs there naturally. The final phrase *le-orekh yamim* (‘for length of days,’ forever) extends this reality into perpetuity. God’s words are reliable, his house is holy, and both endure.

94

Summary: *Psalm 94 is a communal lament calling on God as the ‘God of vengeance’ to rise up and judge the arrogant oppressors who crush the vulnerable — widows, orphans, immigrants — while claiming that God does not see. The psalm moves from urgent appeal (vv. 1-7) to wisdom instruction warning the fools to reconsider (vv. 8-11), to a beatitude for the one God disciplines (vv. 12-15), to personal testimony of God’s sustaining help (vv. 16-23).*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The psalm opens with one of the most startling divine titles in the Psalter: *El neqamot YHWH* (‘God of vengeance, O LORD’). The modern ear flinches at ‘vengeance,’ but the Hebrew concept of *neqamah* is closer to ‘vindication’ — it is the restoration of justice when the powerful have exploited the weak. The oppressors in this psalm are not foreign enemies but domestic tyrants who murder widows, kill orphans, and slaughter immigrants (v. 6) while smugly assuming God is oblivious (v. 7). The psalmist’s cry for vengeance is not personal vindictiveness but a demand that the moral order be enforced. The psalm then pivots remarkably to the language of discipline and instruction (vv. 12-13), suggesting that suffering under oppression can itself be a form of divine education — though the oppressors remain culpable.*

Translation Friction: *The word *neqamah* (‘vengeance’) requires careful handling. In English, ‘vengeance’ implies personal spite or retaliatory rage. In Hebrew, *neqamah* is a legal concept — it is the authority’s obligation to punish wrongdoing and restore the wronged. When the psalm calls God *El neqamot*, it is invoking God’s role as the supreme judge who must act when human courts have failed. We retain ‘vengeance’ because ‘vindication’ is too soft for the raw emotion of the psalm’s opening, but the reader should understand it as judicial action, not emotional rage.*

Connections: The catalogue of victims in verse 6 — widow, immigrant, orphan — echoes the covenant protections of Exodus 22:21-24 and Deuteronomy 10:18, where God specifically promises to defend these three groups. The oppressors' claim that 'the LORD does not see' (v. 7) echoes the arrogance condemned in Psalm 10:11 and Ezekiel 8:12. The beatitude in verse 12 ('blessed is the one you discipline') connects to the wisdom tradition of Proverbs 3:11-12 and anticipates the theology of Hebrews 12:5-11. The LXX assigns this psalm to David for Wednesday (the fourth day), placing it in the weekly liturgical rotation of the Second Temple.

¹O God of vengeance, LORD —

O God of vengeance, shine forth!

²Rise up, O judge of the earth;

repay the arrogant what they deserve.

³How long will the wicked, O LORD —

how long will the wicked celebrate?

⁴They pour out arrogant speech;

all the evildoers boast.

⁵They crush your people, O LORD,

and oppress your inheritance.

⁶They kill the widow and the immigrant,

and they murder the fatherless.

⁷And they say, "The LORD does not see;

the God of Jacob pays no attention."

⁸Pay attention, you senseless ones among the people!

You fools — when will you understand?

⁹He who planted the ear — does he not hear?

He who formed the eye — does he not see?

¹⁰He who disciplines nations — will he not correct?

He who teaches humanity knowledge —

¹¹The LORD knows the thoughts of humanity —

they are a breath.

¹²How blessed is the one you discipline, O LORD,

the one you teach from your instruction —

¹³giving him rest from days of trouble,

until a pit is dug for the wicked.

¹⁴For the LORD will not abandon his people;

he will not forsake his inheritance.

¹⁵For justice will return to righteousness,

and all the upright in heart will follow it.

¹⁶Who will rise up for me against the evildoers?
Who will take a stand for me against the workers of wickedness?

¹⁷If the LORD had not been my help,
my soul would soon have dwelt in silence.

¹⁸When I said, "My foot is slipping,"
your faithful love, O LORD, held me up.

¹⁹When anxious thoughts multiply within me,
your consolations delight my soul.

²⁰Can a corrupt throne be allied with you —
one that creates oppression under cover of law?

²¹They band together against the life of the righteous
and condemn innocent blood.

²²But the LORD has been my fortress,
and my God the rock of my refuge.

²³He will turn their own evil back upon them
and destroy them for their wickedness.
The LORD our God will destroy them.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The title *El neqamot* ('God of vengeance') uses the plural *neqamot*, which is likely an intensive plural — not 'vengeances' but 'great vengeance' or 'comprehensive vindication.' God's vengeance is not one act but a thoroughgoing restoration of justice.
2. The title *shofet ha-arets* ('judge of the earth') invokes God's role as the universal magistrate — not merely Israel's God but the judge of all the earth (as Abraham said in Genesis 18:25). The verb *hashev* ('repay, return') with *gemul* ('recompense, what is deserved') asks God to give the arrogant the consequences their actions have earned. The *ge'im* ('the arrogant, the proud') are those who believe themselves above accountability.
3. The *ad matai* ('how long?') repeated twice is the classic lament formula — it appears in Psalms 6:3, 13:1-2, 74:10, and 79:5. The verb *ya'alozu* ('they celebrate, they exult') describes the wicked's jubilant self-confidence. The broken syntax — 'how long will the wicked, O LORD — how long will the wicked celebrate?' — mimics the speaker's emotional state: the sentence can barely contain itself.
4. The verb *yabbi'u* ('they pour out, they gush') suggests words flowing without restraint — verbal incontinence. The word *ataq* ('arrogance, hardness, insolence') describes speech that is bold, presumptuous, and heedless. The verb *yit'ammru* ('they boast, they say great things about themselves') completes the picture: the wicked speak freely, boast openly, and face no consequence. The psalmist sees a world where evil speech goes unchecked.
5. The verbs *yedakke'u* ('they crush') and *ye'annu* ('they oppress, they afflict') describe sustained, systematic abuse. The victims are identified as *ammekha* ('your people') and *nachalatekha* ('your inheritance') — these are not random victims but people who belong to God. The language implies that attacking God's people is an assault on God's own property. The psalmist is building the case for divine intervention: this is not someone else's problem; it is yours, LORD.
6. We render *ger* as 'immigrant' rather than 'stranger' because the *ger* in Israelite law was a non-Israelite living permanently within Israel's borders — a resident alien with legal protections but social vulnerability. 'Stranger' in modern English is too vague; 'immigrant' captures the social reality more accurately.
7. The oppressors' theology is stated explicitly: *lo yir'eh Yah* ('the LORD does not see') and *lo yavin Elohei Ya'aqov* ('the God of Jacob does not understand'). This is practical atheism — not denying God's existence but denying his attentiveness. They believe God is too distant, too disinterested, or too powerless to notice their crimes. The psalmist will demolish this claim in the next four verses with devastating logic.
8. The psalm shifts to wisdom instruction. The *bo'arim* ('senseless ones, brutish ones') and *kesilim* ('fools') are the same terms used in Psalm 92:7. The verb *binu* ('understand, pay attention') and *taskilu* ('will you have insight') are wisdom vocabulary — the psalmist is playing the role of teacher addressing willfully ignorant students. The question *matai taskilu* ('when will you understand?') implies the answer should be obvious.

9. This is one of the most elegant arguments in the Hebrew Bible. It does not appeal to revelation or authority but to common sense: the maker must possess what the made thing possesses. The form is rhetorical question — the expected answer is an emphatic 'yes.'
10. The argument extends from the senses (v. 9) to governance and instruction. The verb *yoser* ('disciplines') and *yokiach* ('corrects, convicts') are terms for judicial and parental authority. The one who holds nations accountable will certainly hold individuals accountable. The final phrase *hamelammed adam da'at* ('he who teaches humanity knowledge') is left without a predicate in the Hebrew — the sentence breaks off, as if the conclusion is so obvious it need not be stated. Some translations supply 'shall he not know?' but the Hebrew lets the silence speak.
11. The conclusion: God does know — he knows human *machshevot* ('thoughts, plans, designs') and he judges them as *hevel* ('vapor, breath, vanity'). The word *hevel* is the key term of Ecclesiastes ('vanity of vanities'), meaning something insubstantial, transient, and ultimately without weight. The oppressors' plans, which seem so solid and successful, are mere vapor in God's assessment. Paul quotes this verse in 1 Corinthians 3:20.
12. The word *torah* here means 'instruction' in its broadest sense — not merely the written law but God's ongoing teaching through life experience. The pairing of discipline (*yasar*) with teaching (*lamad*) insists that God's corrective action is always educational, never merely punitive.
13. The purpose of discipline is *lehashqit* ('to give rest, to grant quiet') — the disciplined one receives inner calm during the *mi-yemei ra* ('days of evil, days of trouble'). This rest is not removal from suffering but composure within it. Meanwhile, the wicked are heading toward a *shachat* ('pit') being dug for them. The image is of a hunter's pit-trap: the wicked walk confidently forward, unaware that the ground ahead has been excavated.
14. Two verbs of rejection — *yittosh* ('will cast off, will abandon') and *ya'azov* ('will forsake') — are both negated. God's commitment to *ammo* ('his people') and *nachalato* ('his inheritance') is permanent. The same assurance appears in 1 Samuel 12:22 and Romans 11:1-2. The verse grounds the believer's endurance: the discipline of verses 12-13 is not abandonment but pedagogy.
15. The verse promises that *mishpat* ('justice, judgment') will return to *tsedeq* ('righteousness'). Justice has strayed — the wicked have corrupted the courts, perverted the legal system. But it will come back to its proper alignment with righteousness. When it does, *kol yishrei lev* ('all the upright in heart') will follow — the righteous community will rally to justice restored. The verse envisions a future realignment of the moral order.
16. The psalmist now speaks personally. The questions *mi yaqum li* ('who will rise for me?') and *mi yityatsev li* ('who will stand for me?') express the isolation of the righteous person facing organized evil alone. The implied answer is: no human ally appeared — only God (as the next verse reveals).
17. The word *dumah* ('silence') is a euphemism for death — the silence of the grave, where no praise is offered (Psalm 115:17). The phrase *kim'at* ('almost, soon, nearly') reveals how close the psalmist came to destruction. The counterfactual construction (*lulei*, 'if not') attributes survival entirely to God: without divine intervention, death was imminent.
18. The image of the slipping foot (*matah ragli*) represents moral or existential collapse — losing one's footing in life. At exactly that moment, *chasdekha YHWH* ('your faithful love, O LORD') intervened. The verb *yis'adeni* ('it supported me, it held me up') is from *sa'ad*, which means to sustain, to prop up, to brace. God's *chesed* is not a feeling but a structural support that prevents collapse.
19. The word *sar'appai* ('my anxious thoughts, my disquieting thoughts') is a rare word suggesting mental turmoil — thoughts that branch and multiply uncontrollably. The *be-rov* ('in the multitude, when they are many') intensifies the picture. Against this flood of anxiety, God provides *tanchumekha* ('your consolations, your comforts'), and these consolations *yesh'a'ash'u nafshi* ('delight my soul'). The verb *sha'asha* ('to delight, to fondle, to caress') is a term of deep pleasure. The psalm honestly describes anxiety and honestly describes its remedy: divine comfort that produces actual delight, not mere endurance.
20. The *kisse havvot* ('throne of destruction/corruption') refers to a seat of power that legislates injustice. The phrase *yotser amal alei choq* ('fashioning oppression by decree') is one of the most politically charged statements in the Psalter: it describes rulers who use legal systems to institutionalize suffering. The rhetorical question expects the answer 'No' — God cannot be allied with rulers who weaponize law against the vulnerable. This verse condemns systemic, legalized injustice as incompatible with God's character.
21. The verb *yagoddu* ('they band together, they attack in a mob') describes coordinated group violence against the *nefesh tsaddiq* ('the life/soul of the righteous'). The phrase *dam naqi yarshi'u* ('they condemn innocent blood') refers to judicial murder — using the legal system to execute the guiltless. The combination of mob action and legal machinery creates a picture of total injustice: both the streets and the courts have been captured by the wicked.
22. Against the assembled forces of institutional wickedness, the psalmist has one resource: *YHWH li le-misgav* ('the LORD is my fortress'). The *misgav* ('high fortress, stronghold') is an elevated defensive position — a cliff fortress beyond the reach of attackers. The *tsur machasi* ('rock of my refuge') combines the imagery of immovable stone with sheltering safety. The two metaphors — fortress and rock — together convey both elevation (beyond reach) and solidity (beyond destruction).
23. The final verse returns to the vengeance theme of verse 1. The verb *vayyashev* ('he will turn back, he will repay') describes God redirecting the oppressors' *onam* ('their wickedness') back onto them — their own weapons become their undoing. The verb *yatsमित* ('he will annihilate them') is repeated twice for emphasis — total, complete destruction. The psalm ends with the full covenantal name: *YHWH Eloheinu* ('the LORD our God'), claiming God as the community's own. The God who seemed absent (v. 7) has the last word.

95

Summary: *Psalm 95 divides sharply into two halves. The first (vv. 1-7a) is an exuberant call to worship the LORD as creator and shepherd, summoning the congregation to sing, shout, kneel, and bow. The second (vv. 7b-11) shifts without warning to a divine oracle of warning: 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as at Meribah, as on the day of Massah in the wilderness.' The psalm has no superscription in the Hebrew text, though the LXX attributes it to David.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The whiplash between the two halves of this psalm is its most important feature. The congregation is singing, rejoicing, bowing before their maker — and then God interrupts with a warning. The liturgy of praise becomes a test of obedience. The word hayyom ('today') is the hinge: worship is not a nostalgic celebration of past salvation but a present-tense encounter with a God who is still speaking and still expecting a response. The letter to the Hebrews (3:7-4:13) will build an entire theology of 'rest' and 'today' from this psalm, arguing that the warning remains active for every generation. The God who is praised as creator (vv. 4-5) and shepherd (v. 7) is also the God who swore in anger that a disobedient generation would never enter his rest (v. 11). Worship that does not include listening is insufficient.*

Translation Friction: *The Hebrew of verse 7b-c is notoriously difficult to divide. The phrase hu Eloheinu va'anachnu am mar'ito ve-tson yado ('he is our God and we are the people of his pasture and the flock of his hand') ends one section, and hayyom im be-qolo tishma'u ('today, if you hear his voice') begins the next. But where exactly does the break fall? The Masoretic accents place the major break after yado ('his hand'), making 'today if you hear his voice' the start of the warning oracle. This means the pastoral image of God as shepherd leads directly into the demand for obedience — the same God who tends the flock expects the flock to listen. The place names Meribah ('quarreling') and Massah ('testing') refer to Exodus 17:1-7 and Numbers 20:1-13, where Israel provocation in the wilderness led to Moses striking the rock.*

Connections: *The call to worship in verses 1-2 parallels Psalm 100. The creation theology of verses 4-5 (God's hands formed the dry land, the depths of the earth are in his hand) echoes Psalm 24:1-2 and Job 38. The wilderness warning connects to the rebellion narratives of Exodus 17, Numbers 14, and Deuteronomy 1:19-46. The divine oath 'they shall not enter my rest' (v. 11) becomes the foundation of Hebrews 3-4, where 'rest' (menucha/katapausis) is reinterpreted as the eschatological Sabbath rest that remains available to the faithful.*

¹Come, let us sing out to the LORD;
let us shout to the rock of our salvation!

²Let us come before his face with thanksgiving;
with songs let us shout to him!

³the LORD is a great God,
a great king above all gods.

⁴In his hand are the depths of the earth,
and the mountain peaks belong to him.

⁵The sea is his — he made it,
and the dry land — his hands formed it.

⁶Come, let us bow down in worship;
let us kneel before the LORD our maker!

⁷For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture,

the flock under his hand.

Today — if you hear his voice —

⁸do not harden your hearts as at Meribah,
as on the day of Massah in the wilderness,

⁹when your ancestors tested me,
tried me, though they had seen my work.

¹⁰For forty years I was disgusted with that generation,
and I said, "They are a people whose hearts go astray;
they have not known my ways."

¹¹So I swore in my anger,
"They shall never enter my rest."

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verbs *nerannenh* ('let us sing out, let us cry aloud') and *nari'ah* ('let us shout, let us raise a war cry') are not verbs of quiet devotion. *rannan* is a verb of piercing, joyful noise; *rua* is the shout of a crowd — a battle cry or an acclamation at a coronation. The worship envisioned here is loud, communal, and physical. The title *tsur yish'enu* ('rock of our salvation') combines the fortress imagery of Psalm 94:22 with salvation vocabulary.
2. The verb *neqaddemah* ('let us come before, let us meet') with *panav* ('his face') suggests approaching God's presence with eagerness — literally, going out to meet God before he arrives. The word *todah* ('thanksgiving') is both a disposition and a genre — it refers to the thanksgiving offering and the psalm that accompanies it. The worship described is prepared, intentional, and musical.
3. The phrase *melekh gadol al kol elohim* ('a great king above all gods') does not affirm the existence of other deities but asserts God's supremacy over any rival claim to divinity. The language is competitive — in a world of many claimed gods, YHWH is not one among equals but the sovereign over all. This is the theological foundation for the worship commanded in verses 1-2: the LORD deserves the loudest praise because he occupies the highest throne.
4. The spatial range is total: *mechqerei arets* ('the depths of the earth,' the lowest points, the caverns and recesses beneath the surface) and *to'afot harim* ('the peaks of the mountains,' the highest elevations). From deepest below to highest above, everything is *be-yado* ('in his hand') — under his control and in his possession. The word *mechqerei* (from *chaqar*, 'to search out, to explore') implies depths that humans cannot fully investigate but that God holds in his palm.
5. Two domains: *hayyam* ('the sea') and *yabbeshset* ('the dry land'). God's relationship to each is stated differently: the sea *asher lo... ve-hu asahu* ('is his... and he made it') and the dry land *yadav yatsaru* ('his hands formed it'). The verb *yatsaru* ('formed, fashioned') is the potter's verb, suggesting intimate craftsmanship. The sea and dry land together encompass the entire surface of the earth — nothing exists that God did not make and does not own.
6. The verb *nishtachaveh* (*hishtachawah*) is the standard Hebrew term for worship-prostration. It involves lying face-down on the ground — not a casual nod or bowed head but full-body submission. Ancient Israelite worship was physically demanding and posturally humble.
7. The Masoretic cantillation marks place the major pause (*atnach*) after *yado* ('his hand'), making 'today if you hear his voice' the beginning of a new section. This division is followed by the book of Hebrews (3:7-8), which quotes the verse beginning with 'Today.' The pastoral warmth of the first half makes the warning of the second half all the more jolting.
8. We retain the Hebrew place names Meribah and Massah rather than translating them as 'Quarreling' and 'Testing' because they function as historical references — the worshipers would have known the stories. However, the etymological meanings are essential: every time these names are spoken, the words 'quarrel' and 'test' echo beneath them.
9. Two verbs for testing: *nissuni* ('they tested me') and *bechanuni* ('they tried me, they examined me'). The testing was not innocent inquiry but hostile challenge — putting God on trial, demanding proof of his presence and power. The devastating qualifier: *gam ra'u fo'oli* ('though they had also seen my work'). They had witnessed the plagues, the parting of the sea, the manna, the water from the rock — and still demanded more evidence. Their hardness was not caused by insufficient revelation but by refusal to trust what they had already received.
10. The verb *aqut* ('I was disgusted, I loathed, I was weary of') is a strong verb of revulsion — not mild disappointment but visceral repugnance. For *arba'im shanah* ('forty years') — an entire generation — God endured a people who were *to'ei levav* ('wandering in heart,' hearts that strayed from the path). The divine verdict is devastating: *lo yad'u derakhay* ('they have not known my ways'). After forty years of miracles, provision, and instruction, they still did not know God's character or intentions. The verb *yada* ('to know') here implies relational intimacy — they had information about God but no knowledge of him.

11. The Hebrew oath formula *im* + imperfect is a strong negative when spoken by God: 'if they enter my rest...' with the apodosis (consequence) left unstated because it is too terrible to speak. This is equivalent to: 'they will absolutely never enter my rest.' The *menuchah* ('rest') in its original context refers to the land of Canaan (Deuteronomy 12:9), but the concept was reinterpreted eschatologically in both Jewish and Christian tradition as God's eternal Sabbath rest.

96

Summary: *Psalm 96 is a hymn of universal praise calling all the earth — not merely Israel — to sing a 'new song' to the LORD. It declares God's glory among the nations, dismisses the gods of the peoples as worthless, and summons the entire created order — heavens, earth, sea, fields, and forests — to rejoice because the LORD is coming to judge the earth with righteousness and faithfulness. The psalm has no superscription in the Hebrew text but appears in a parallel version in 1 Chronicles 16:23-33.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This psalm explodes Israel's worship beyond its ethnic boundaries. The command is not 'Sing to the LORD, O Israel' but *shiru la-YHWH kol ha-arets* ('Sing to the LORD, all the earth'). The Hebrew word *arets* means both 'earth' and 'land,' and here it means the whole planet. The nations (*goyim*) and peoples (*ammim*) are summoned to praise, creation itself is summoned to celebrate, and the reason given is not God's past salvation of Israel but his coming judgment of the entire world. The judgment is presented as good news — the earth rejoices at God's coming because his rule means *tsedeq ve-emunah* ('righteousness and faithfulness'). This is not judgment as punishment but judgment as the establishment of a just order that all creation has been waiting for.*

Translation Friction: *Verse 5 contains a wordplay that defies translation: *kol elohei ha-ammim elim* ('all the gods of the peoples are elim'). The word *elim* sounds like *elohim* ('gods') but means 'worthless things, nothings, nonentities.' Some scholars connect it to *al* ('not') — making the gods 'not-gods,' anti-gods, nothings masquerading as somethings. The dismissal is not that other gods are weak but that they are empty — there is nothing there. The parallel in 1 Chronicles 16:23-33 contains some significant textual differences, suggesting that one text was adapted from the other or both drew from a common liturgical source.*

Connections: *The 'new song' (*shir chadash*) motif connects to Psalms 33:3, 40:3, 98:1, 144:9, 149:1, and Isaiah 42:10. The phrase *YHWH malakh* ('the LORD reigns') in verse 10 links this psalm to the enthronement cluster (Psalms 93, 97, 99). The cosmic response to God's coming (trees singing, sea roaring, fields exulting) is paralleled in Isaiah 55:12 and Psalm 98:7-8. The 1 Chronicles 16 parallel places this psalm in the context of David bringing the ark to Jerusalem — the moment when Israel's worship finds its permanent home.*

¹Sing to the LORD a new song!
Sing to the LORD, all the earth!

²Sing to the LORD, bless his name!
Proclaim his salvation day after day!

³Declare his glory among the nations,
his wonders among all peoples!

⁴he is to be feared above all gods.
For the LORD is great and greatly to be praised;

⁵For all the gods of the peoples are worthless things,
but the LORD made the heavens.

⁶Splendor and majesty stand before him;
strength and glory fill his sanctuary.

⁷Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples!
Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength!

⁸Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name!
Bring an offering and come into his courts!

⁹Worship the LORD in holy splendor!
Tremble before him, all the earth!

¹⁰Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns!"
The world is established; it cannot be shaken.
He will judge the peoples with equity.

¹¹Let the heavens rejoice and the earth be glad;
let the sea roar, and all that fills it!

¹²Let the field exult, and everything in it!
Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy

¹³before the LORD, for he is coming —
for he is coming to judge the earth.
He will judge the world with righteousness
and the peoples with his faithfulness.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The shir chadash ('new song') is not merely a recently composed melody — it is a song that responds to a new act of God. The 'newness' corresponds to the freshness of divine action. The command shiru ('sing!') is an imperative addressed to kol ha-arets ('all the earth'), which universalizes the call beyond any single nation or community.
2. The verb bassru ('proclaim, announce good news') is the verbal form of besorah ('good news, gospel'). This is evangelistic language — the worshipers are commanded to announce God's yeshu'ato ('his salvation') to the world. The phrase mi-yom le-yom ('from day to day') means the proclamation is not occasional but daily, continuous, never pausing.
3. The verb sappru ('declare, recount, tell') with ba-goyim ('among the nations') and be-khol ha-ammim ('among all the peoples') makes Israel's worship a mission to the world. God's kevodo ('his glory') and nifl'otav ('his wonders') are not private possessions of the covenant community but realities to be broadcast universally.
4. The phrase mehullal me'od ('greatly to be praised') uses the passive participle of halal ('to praise') — God is inherently praiseworthy, whether or not anyone is currently praising him. The nora ('fearsome, to be feared') indicates that the proper response to God's greatness includes not just admiration but awe. The phrase al kol elohim ('above all gods') continues the competitive theology: whatever else claims divine status, YHWH towers above it.
5. The word elim is sometimes rendered 'idols,' but that refers to the physical objects of worship. elim refers to what those objects represent: nothing. We render it 'worthless things' to capture the sense of emptiness rather than merely the physical artifact.
6. Four attributes attend God's presence: hod ('splendor, radiance'), hadar ('majesty, honor'), oz ('strength, might'), and tif'eret ('glory, beauty'). The first pair stands lefanav ('before him') — in his presence, approaching his throne. The second pair is be-miqdosho ('in his sanctuary') — filling his temple. The verse personifies these qualities as attendants in a royal court, standing before the king and filling his chambers.
7. The imperative havu ('give, ascribe') addressed to mishpechot amim ('families of the peoples') extends the call beyond Israel to every clan and nation on earth. The language echoes Psalm 29:1-2, where the same imperative is addressed to bene elim ('sons of gods,' the divine council). What the heavenly beings do in Psalm 29, all human families are summoned to do here: attribute kavod ('glory') and oz ('strength') to the LORD.
8. The kevod shemo ('the glory of his name') means the honor that his reputation deserves. The command se'u minchah ('bring a grain offering') and u-vo'u le-chatsrotav ('and come into his courts') invites the nations into Israel's temple worship. The minchah is a grain or tribute offering — the approach of a subject before a sovereign. The universalism of the psalm reaches its peak: the nations are not merely told to acknowledge God from a distance but to enter his courts with offerings.

9. The phrase *be-hadrat qodesh* ('in the splendor of holiness') may refer to holy garments (the priests' vestments) or to the splendor that holiness itself radiates. The verb *chilu* ('tremble, writhe, be in anguish') is a verb of physical shaking — not merely emotional reverence but bodily tremor in the presence of the holy. The command is addressed to *kol ha-arets* ('all the earth') — every nation, every person, every creature.
10. The instruction to declare *YHWH malakh ba-goyim* ('among the nations') is remarkable — it envisions Israel as a herald to the world, not a sect withdrawn from it. The message is political as well as theological: the LORD reigns means no human empire has ultimate authority.
11. The cosmic response begins. The *shamayim* ('heavens') and *eret* ('earth') form the standard merism for 'everything' (as in Genesis 1:1). The *hayyam u-melo'o* ('the sea and everything filling it') adds the aquatic realm. Three domains — sky, land, sea — respond with *simchah* ('joy'), *gilah* ('gladness'), and *ra'am* ('thunder, roaring'). Creation itself celebrates God's coming reign. This is not pathetic fallacy but theological conviction: the non-human creation has a stake in God's justice.
12. The *sadai* ('the field,' open agricultural land) and *kol asher bo* ('everything in it') bring the cultivated world into the celebration. Then *kol atsei ya'ar* ('all the trees of the forest') — the wild, uncultivated trees — *yerannu* ('will sing for joy'). The verb *rannan* is the same piercing, exuberant cry of verse 1. Trees singing is not merely poetic embellishment — it expresses the conviction that the non-human creation participates in the cosmic drama. Romans 8:19-22 will articulate this same idea: creation groans, waiting for liberation.
13. The entire psalm builds toward this verse. Every imperative — sing, proclaim, declare, ascribe, worship, tremble — has been leading to this moment: God is coming. The judgment of the earth is presented not as threat but as consummation — the event all creation has been waiting for.

97

Summary: *Psalm 97 is an enthronement psalm celebrating the LORD's reign over the earth with theophanic imagery — fire, lightning, melting mountains — and contrasting the shame of idol worshipers with the joy of Zion. The psalm moves from the cosmic display of God's power (vv. 1-6) to the humiliation of those who worship images (vv. 7-9) to a closing exhortation to the righteous to hate evil, trust God's protection, and rejoice (vv. 10-12). It has no superscription in the Hebrew text.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This psalm reads like a volcanic eruption of divine presence. The theophany of verses 2-5 borrows heavily from the Sinai tradition — cloud, darkness, fire, lightning, trembling earth — and applies it to God's ongoing reign rather than a single historical event. The mountains melt like wax before the LORD, which is not hyperbole in the ancient Near Eastern mind but a description of what happens when the maker of mountains appears. The psalm then pivots to one of its most cutting lines: 'All who serve carved images are put to shame, those who boast in worthless things. All gods bow down before him' (v. 7). The shame of idolatry is not punishment but revelation — when the true God appears, the emptiness of every substitute becomes visible. The LXX version of verse 7 ('worship him, all you gods') is quoted in Hebrews 1:6 as a reference to angels worshipping the Son.*

Translation Friction: *Verse 7 presents a translation challenge: hishtachavu lo kol elohim ('bow down before him, all gods'). Who are the elohim commanded to worship? The options include: other gods (acknowledged as real but subordinate), angelic beings (members of the divine council), or human rulers (elohim used for judges, as in Psalm 82:1,6). The LXX rendered it angeloi ('angels'), which is how Hebrews 1:6 receives it. The psalm itself does not clarify — it simply commands every being claiming divine status to submit. Verse 10 contains a textual issue: the Masoretic text reads 'he guards the souls of his faithful ones' (nefesh chasidav), but some manuscripts and the LXX tradition read differently. We follow the MT.*

Connections: *The YHWH malakh opening connects to Psalms 93:1, 96:10, and 99:1. The theophanic fire and cloud connect to Exodus 19:16-18 (Sinai), Psalm 18:7-15 (David's theophany), and Habakkuk 3:3-6 (the warrior-God). The 'mountains melt like wax' image appears in Micah 1:4 and Nahum 1:5. The command to the righteous to 'hate evil' (v. 10) echoes Amos 5:15 and Proverbs 8:13. The closing call to 'rejoice in the LORD' (v. 12) anticipates the persistent joy-theology of the enthronement psalms.*

‡The LORD reigns! Let the earth rejoice;
let the many coastlands be glad!

²Cloud and thick darkness surround him;
righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.

³Fire goes before him
and consumes his adversaries on every side.

⁴His lightning bolts light up the world;
the earth sees and writhes.

⁵Mountains melt like wax before the LORD,
before the Lord of all the earth.

⁶and all the peoples see his glory.
The heavens declare his righteousness,

⁷All who serve carved images are put to shame,
those who boast in worthless things.
Bow down before him, all you gods!

⁸Zion hears and is glad;
the daughters of Judah rejoice
because of your judgments, O LORD.

⁹For you, O LORD, are Most High over all the earth;
you are exalted far above all gods.

¹⁰You who love the LORD, hate evil!
He guards the lives of his faithful ones;
from the hand of the wicked he rescues them.

¹¹Light is sown for the righteous,
and joy for the upright in heart.

¹²Rejoice in the LORD, you righteous!
Give thanks to his holy name!

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The enthronement cry YHWH malakh opens the psalm as in Psalms 93 and 99. The response is cosmic joy: tagel ha-arets ('let the earth exult') and yismchu iyyim rabbim ('let the many coastlands rejoice'). The iyyim ('coastlands, islands') represent the most distant, peripheral territories of the known world — the Mediterranean coasts and islands at the edge of Israel's geographical awareness. Even the remotest places are summoned to celebrate.
2. The pairing of tsedek ('righteousness') and mishpat ('justice') as the foundation of God's throne also appears in Psalm 89:14. These are not abstract qualities but structural necessities — remove righteousness and justice, and the throne collapses. God's sovereignty is not arbitrary power but power exercised through moral order.
3. The esh lefanav telekh ('fire goes before him') describes fire as God's herald or advance guard — it precedes his arrival and clears the way. The verb telaht ('it consumes, it blazes') describes intense burning. The tsarav ('his adversaries') are consumed not as a separate punitive act but as an inherent consequence of proximity to God's holiness. Fire in theophany is not wrath but nature — God is fire, and what opposes him cannot survive contact.
4. The beraqav ('his lightning bolts') illuminate the tevel ('the world') — the darkness of verse 2 is pierced by blinding flashes. The earth's response is visceral: ra'atah vattachel ('it saw and it writhed'). The verb chul ('to writhe, to tremble, to be in labor pain') describes not mild trembling but the convulsion of a body in agony. The earth personified as a witness who sees God's lightning and writhes in response.

5. The image of mountains — the most permanent, immovable features of the landscape — melting ka-donag ('like wax') before God is the psalm's most extreme statement of divine power. Wax before fire has no resistance; it simply ceases to be solid. The title Adon kol ha-arets ('Lord of all the earth') appears in Joshua 3:11 for the God who parts the Jordan. The point is scale: what seems most permanent in human experience (mountains) is the most fragile before God.
6. The shamayim ('heavens') serve as witnesses, declaring tsidqo ('his righteousness'). The theophany is not private — kol ha-ammim ('all the peoples') see kevodo ('his glory'). The verse insists that God's self-revelation is public, universal, and undeniable. When God acts in judgment and salvation, the evidence is visible to every nation.
7. The LXX renders kol elohim as pantes hoi angeloi autou ('all his angels'), which is the form quoted in Hebrews 1:6 as proof that the Son is greater than the angels. The Hebrew elohim is broader — it includes any being with a claim to divine status.
8. While the idolaters are shamed, Zion responds with joy. The sham'ah vattismach Tsiyyon ('Zion heard and rejoiced') contrasts with the earth's writhing in verse 4 — for God's own people, the same theophany produces gladness. The benot Yehudah ('daughters of Judah') likely refers to the towns and villages of Judah personified as daughters of the mother city Zion. The cause of joy is le-ma'an mishpatekha ('because of your judgments') — God's acts of justice bring relief and celebration to his people.
9. The verse restates the psalm's central claim: YHWH Elyon al kol ha-arets ('the LORD is Most High over all the earth') and me'od na'aleita al kol elohim ('you are greatly exalted above all gods'). The adverb me'od ('exceedingly, greatly') intensifies the exaltation — the distance between God and all rivals is not marginal but infinite. This verse functions as the theological summary of everything stated in verses 1-8.
10. The imperative sin'u ra ('hate evil!') is addressed to ohavei YHWH ('lovers of the LORD'). Love for God and hatred of evil are presented as inseparable — you cannot have one without the other. The promise follows: shomer nafshot chasidav ('he guards the lives of his faithful ones'). The chasidav ('his faithful ones, his devoted ones') from chesed describes those characterized by loyal love. The verb yatsilem ('he rescues them') from the hand of the wicked promises active divine intervention on their behalf.
11. The image of light being zaru'a ('sown') like seed is extraordinary. Light is not simply given but planted — scattered into the soil of the present to grow into a harvest in the future. The righteous (tsaddiq) and the upright in heart (yishrei lev) do not yet see the full light, but it has been sown for them. This is a verse about the hiddenness of hope: the outcome is planted but not yet visible. Simchah ('joy') is the parallel crop — sown alongside the light, growing toward a day of harvest.
12. The closing command simchu tsaddiqim ba-YHWH ('rejoice in the LORD, you righteous') brings the psalm full circle — verse 1 called the earth to rejoice; verse 12 calls the righteous specifically. The phrase hodu le-zekher qodsho ('give thanks to the memorial of his holiness') uses zekher ('memorial, remembrance') to refer to God's name — the name is the means by which God is remembered and invoked. His holiness (qodsho) is what makes the name powerful and the remembrance life-giving.

98

Summary: *Psalm 98 is a 'new song' psalm celebrating God's saving acts, which he has made visible to all nations. It summons the whole earth to shout, sing, and play instruments before the LORD, then calls the natural world — sea, rivers, mountains — to join the praise because God is coming to judge the earth. The superscription simply reads mizmor ('a psalm').*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 98 is the twin of Psalm 96 — they share vocabulary, structure, and theology — yet each has its own emphasis. Where Psalm 96 focuses on declaring God's glory among the nations, Psalm 98 focuses on what God has revealed: his yeshu'ah ('salvation'), his tsedaqah ('righteousness'), his chesed ('faithful love'), and his emunah ('faithfulness') toward Israel — all of which the nations have witnessed. The remarkable claim is that God's faithfulness to Israel is itself evidence intended for the watching world. Israel's particular salvation has universal significance. The closing verses (7-9) are nearly identical to Psalm 96:11-13, creating a liturgical echo: the creation's joyful response to God's coming judgment is a recurring chorus in Israel's worship, not a one-time poetic flourish.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase hodia ('he has made known') in verse 2 raises a question: made known to whom? The answer is le-einei ha-goyim ('before the eyes of the nations'). God's acts of salvation for Israel were performed on a public stage — the exodus, the return from exile, every act of deliverance — and the audience was always wider than Israel. This means Israel's history is not private but pedagogical: God teaches the world through what he does for his people. The 'new song' of verse 1 may refer to a specific deliverance (perhaps the return from Babylonian exile) or may be eschatological — a song for the final salvation.*

Connections: The 'new song' command connects to Psalms 33:3, 40:3, 96:1, 144:9, 149:1, and Isaiah 42:10. The four divine attributes in verses 2-3 (salvation, righteousness, faithful love, faithfulness) form a cluster that appears in Psalm 36:5-6, 89:1-2, and Isaiah 59:16-17. The cosmic praise of verses 7-9 parallels Psalm 96:11-13 and Isaiah 55:12. The 'right hand and holy arm' of verse 1 echoes Isaiah 52:10 and Exodus 15:6. Isaac Watts famously paraphrased this psalm as 'Joy to the World,' making it one of the most widely known psalms in Western culture.

¹A psalm.

Sing to the LORD a new song,
for he has done wonders!
His right hand and his holy arm
have won him victory.

²The LORD has made his salvation known;
before the eyes of the nations
he has revealed his righteousness.

³He has remembered his faithful love
and his faithfulness to the house of Israel.
All the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation of our God.

⁴Shout to the LORD, all the earth!
Burst into song, sing for joy, make music!

⁵Make music to the LORD with the lyre —
with the lyre and the sound of melody!

⁶With trumpets and the sound of the ram's horn,
shout before the king — the LORD!

⁷Let the sea roar, and all that fills it —
the world and all who dwell in it!

⁸Let the rivers clap their hands;
let the mountains sing for joy together

⁹before the LORD, for he is coming
to judge the earth.
He will judge the world with righteousness
and the peoples with equity.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The phrase *hoshi'ah lo* ('has saved for himself') is unusual — God's salvation benefits Israel, but the victory belongs to God. Isaiah 59:16 uses the same image: 'His own arm brought him salvation.' The right hand and holy arm together echo Exodus 15:6 ('Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power') and Isaiah 52:10 ('The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations').
2. Two verbs of disclosure: *hodia* ('he has made known') and *gillah* ('he has revealed, uncovered'). Both suggest something previously hidden now brought to light. God's *yeshu'ato* ('his salvation') and *tsidqato* ('his righteousness') were always real but are now publicly visible. The audience is *le-einei ha-goyim* ('before the eyes of the nations') — God's saving acts for Israel are performed on a world stage. The nations are not incidental bystanders but intended witnesses.

3. This verse is one of the most concise statements of the relationship between Israel's particular election and God's universal purpose. God remembers his love for Israel, acts to save Israel, and the whole world sees it. Israel's story is not private but revelatory — through it, the nations learn who God is.
4. Four imperatives pile up: hari'u ('shout,' the acclamation cry), pitschu ('burst out,' the spontaneous eruption of song), ranenu ('sing for joy,' the piercing cry of exultation), and zammeru ('make music,' the instrumental accompaniment). The escalation builds from a single shout to a full orchestral celebration. The addressee is again kol ha-arets ('all the earth') — this is worship on a planetary scale.
5. The kinnor ('lyre') is mentioned twice for emphasis — it was the primary instrument of temple worship, the instrument David played. The qol zimrah ('sound of melody, voice of song') may refer to the human voice singing alongside the instrument, creating a blend of vocal and instrumental worship.
6. The chatsotsrot ('trumpets,' metal instruments blown by priests) and shofar ('ram's horn') together create the full fanfare of Israelite worship. The shofar was blown at coronations, at the new year, and at moments of divine visitation. The title ha-melek YHWH ('the king, the LORD') makes explicit what the enthronement psalms have been declaring: this is royal worship for a reigning sovereign.
7. The cosmic praise section begins, closely paralleling Psalm 96:11-12. The sea (hayyam) is summoned first — the same waters that in Psalm 93 crashed against God's throne now roar in celebration. The tevel ve-yoshvei vah ('the world and those who dwell in it') brings humanity into the cosmic choir alongside the natural world.
8. The neharot ('rivers') clapping and the harim ('mountains') singing are among the most vivid personifications in the Psalter. The verb yimcha'u kaf ('they clap their hands') pictures the rhythmic slapping of waves against riverbanks as applause. The mountains singing yachad ('together, in unison') suggests harmony — the entire landscape joining in a chorus. This is not mere poetic decoration but theological conviction: the non-human creation has a voice and a stake in God's reign.
9. The closing verse nearly matches Psalm 96:13, with one notable difference: Psalm 96:13 says God will judge with tsedek and emunah ('righteousness and faithfulness'), while Psalm 98:9 says tsedek and misharim ('righteousness and equity'). Both affirm that God's judgment is characterized by moral integrity and fairness. The substitution of misharim ('equity, evenness') for emunah ('faithfulness') emphasizes the impartiality of God's judgment — he will judge on a level playing field, with no favoritism for the powerful.

99

Summary: *Psalm 99 is the last of the 'YHWH reigns' enthronement psalms (93, 95-99). It declares God's kingship from Zion, celebrates his love of justice, and recounts his dealings with Moses, Aaron, and Samuel as evidence that he is both accessible and holy. The psalm is structured around a triple refrain emphasizing God's holiness (vv. 3, 5, 9) and has no superscription.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The triple repetition of holiness — 'Holy is he' (qadosh hu, vv. 3, 5) and 'the LORD our God is holy' (qadosh YHWH Eloheinu, v. 9) — gives this psalm a quasi-Isaianic quality, echoing the seraphim's 'Holy, holy, holy' in Isaiah 6:3. Holiness in this psalm is not abstract purity but relational: the holy God answered when Moses, Aaron, and Samuel called; he spoke to them from the pillar of cloud; he forgave them while also holding them accountable for their actions (v. 8). The combination of forgiveness and accountability — El nose lahem ve-noqem al alilotam ('a God who forgave them yet avenged their deeds') — is one of the most theologically precise statements in the Psalter. God's holiness does not erase either his mercy or his justice; it holds both simultaneously.*

Translation Friction: *Verse 8 is the most complex verse in the psalm. The phrase El nose lahem can mean 'a God who forgave them' or 'a God who bore [their burden] for them.' The ve-noqem al alilotam ('and avenging/punishing their deeds') seems to contradict forgiveness — how can God both forgive and punish? The answer lies in the Hebrew understanding of holiness: God's forgiveness does not mean the absence of consequences. Moses was forgiven but denied entry to the promised land (Numbers 20:12). Aaron was forgiven but his sons Nadab and Abihu died (Leviticus 10:1-2). Samuel was forgiven but watched Israel demand a king (1 Samuel 8). Forgiveness restores relationship; consequences remain as markers of holiness.*

Connections: *The YHWH malakh opening connects to Psalms 93:1, 96:10, and 97:1, completing the enthronement cluster. The cherubim throne imagery (yoshev keruvim, v. 1) connects to 1 Samuel 4:4, 2 Samuel 6:2, and Isaiah 37:16. The triad of Moses, Aaron, and Samuel as intercessors echoes Jeremiah 15:1, where God says even Moses and Samuel could not intercede for this generation. The pillar of cloud (v. 7) connects to Exodus 33:9-11 and Numbers 12:5. The triple holiness anticipates the trisagion of Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8.*

¹The LORD reigns — let the peoples tremble!
He sits enthroned on the cherubim — let the earth quake!

²The LORD is great in Zion;
he is exalted above all the peoples.

³Let them praise your great and fearsome name —
holy is he!

⁴The strength of the king loves justice.
You have established equity;
justice and righteousness in Jacob —
you have accomplished them.

⁵Exalt the LORD our God!
Bow down at his footstool —
holy is he!

⁶Moses and Aaron were among his priests,
and Samuel was among those who called on his name.
They called on the LORD, and he answered them.

⁷In the pillar of cloud he spoke to them.
They kept his decrees
and the statutes he gave them.

⁸O LORD our God, you answered them.
You were a forgiving God to them,
yet one who held them accountable for their deeds.

⁹Exalt the LORD our God
and bow down at his holy mountain,
for the LORD our God is holy!

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The cherubim (keruvim) are not the chubby winged infants of Renaissance art but the massive, fearsome composite creatures of ancient Near Eastern iconography — part human, part animal, part divine. In Ezekiel 1 and 10, they are the living beings who bear God's throne-chariot. In the tabernacle and temple, their images topped the ark, and God was said to dwell 'between the cherubim' (1 Samuel 4:4, 2 Samuel 6:2).
2. God's greatness has a location: be-Tsiyyon ('in Zion'). This does not limit God to one place but identifies where his presence is concentrated — the temple mount, the city of David, the place where God chose to make his name dwell (Deuteronomy 12:5). Yet he is simultaneously *ram hu al kol ha-ammim* ('high above all the peoples') — Zion is the base, but his sovereignty is universal.
3. The first refrain: *qadosh hu* ('holy is he!'). God's name is *gadol* ('great') and *nora* ('fearsome, awe-inspiring'), and the summary verdict is holiness. The word *qadosh* ('holy') means 'set apart, other, distinct from all that is common.' God's holiness is not one attribute among many — it is the quality that makes all his other attributes divine rather than merely admirable. Holiness is what makes God's love different from human love, God's justice different from human justice.
4. The phrase *oz melekh mishpat ahev* ('the strength of the king loves justice') is compressed and unusual. The 'king' is God — his royal power (*oz*) is characterized not by conquest but by love of *mishpat* ('justice'). God does not merely practice justice reluctantly; he loves it. The verb *konanta* ('you have established') with *meisharim* ('equity') declares that fairness is not accidental in God's kingdom but built into the structure. The final declaration — *mishpat u-tsedaqah be-Ya'aqov attah asita* ('justice and righteousness in Jacob, you have accomplished') — locates God's justice in a specific community. Jacob (Israel) is the place where God has demonstrated what justice and righteousness look like in practice.

5. The second refrain: qadosh hu. The verb romemu ('exalt!') calls for active elevation of God's reputation. The hadom raglav ('his footstool') is the ark of the covenant (1 Chronicles 28:2) or the earth itself (Isaiah 66:1). Worshiping at the footstool means approaching the lowest point of God's throne — even the place where God rests his feet is too holy for casual approach. The posture is hishtachavu ('prostrate yourselves') — the deepest form of physical submission.
6. The inclusion of Moses 'among his priests' is theologically significant. Moses served as priest before the Aaronic priesthood was established (Exodus 24:6-8, 32:11-14). The triad of Moses (lawgiver), Aaron (priest), and Samuel (prophet/judge) represents the full range of Israel's mediatorial offices.
7. The ammud anan ('pillar of cloud') was the visible sign of God's presence during the exodus and wilderness period (Exodus 13:21-22, 33:9-11). God's speech came from within the cloud — he was present but concealed, audible but invisible. The edotav ('his decrees') and choq ('statute') refer to the torah given through these mediators. The relationship was mutual: God spoke, they kept his words. The covenant functions on communication and obedience.
8. We render noqem al alilotam as 'one who held them accountable for their deeds' rather than 'one who avenged their deeds' because the context is not punitive wrath but the insistence that actions have consequences even within a forgiven relationship. The English 'vengeance' would obscure the pastoral character of this accountability.
9. The final refrain expands: where verse 3 said qadosh hu ('holy is he') and verse 5 repeated it, verse 9 gives the full form: ki qadosh YHWH Eloheinu ('for the LORD our God is holy!'). The destination of worship shifts from hadom raglav ('his footstool,' v. 5) to har qodsho ('his holy mountain'). The holy mountain is Zion, the temple mount, the place where God's holiness intersects with human geography. The entire psalm has been building toward this declaration: God reigns, God judges, God answers, God forgives, God holds accountable — and through it all, God is holy. Holiness is the thread that binds sovereignty, justice, mercy, and accountability into a single divine character.

100

Summary: *Psalm 100 is a brief, radiant hymn of praise — only five verses — designated as a 'psalm for the thanksgiving offering' (mizmor le-todah). It summons all the earth to worship the LORD with joy, know that he is God, enter his gates with thanksgiving, and bless his name, because the LORD is good, his faithful love endures forever, and his faithfulness extends to every generation.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This psalm is the culmination and crown of the enthronement psalm sequence (93-100). After all the thunder of theophany, the crashing of chaotic waters, the melting of mountains, the warnings about hardened hearts, and the triple invocation of holiness — the sequence ends here, with five verses of unqualified, uncomplicated joy. There are no enemies in this psalm. No lament, no petition, no warning, no theological tension. Only command after command to rejoice, to know, to enter, to thank. The central declaration — de'u ki YHWH hu Elohim, hu asanu ve-lo anachnu, ammo ve-tson mar'ito ('Know that the LORD is God; he made us and we are his, his people and the flock of his pasture') — is one of the most compact creedal statements in the Hebrew Bible. It asserts God's identity, his creatorship, his ownership, and his pastoral care in a single breath.*

Translation Friction: *Verse 3 contains a famous textual variant: the ketiv (written text) reads ve-lo anachnu ('and not we ourselves,' meaning 'he made us, and not we ourselves') while the qere (read text) reads ve-lo anachnu ('and we are his,' with lo spelled as 'to him' rather than 'not'). Both readings are theologically meaningful. The ketiv denies human self-creation: God made us, not we ourselves. The qere affirms divine ownership: he made us and we belong to him. The qere reading is more widely followed and is reflected in our rendering, but the ketiv's denial of autonomous self-creation is equally powerful.*

Connections: *The psalm for the todah ('thanksgiving offering') connects to the todah sacrifice prescribed in Leviticus 7:12-15 — a fellowship offering accompanied by bread and presented with songs of praise. The call to 'all the earth' (kol ha-arets, v. 1) echoes Psalms 96:1 and 98:4. The shepherd imagery (tson mar'ito, 'the flock of his pasture') echoes Psalm 95:7 and Psalm 23. The concluding triad — tov YHWH, le-olam chasdo, ve-ad dor va-dor emunato ('the LORD is good, his faithful love endures forever, and his faithfulness to every generation') — is the liturgical formula that appears in 1 Chronicles 16:34, 2 Chronicles 5:13, 7:3, Ezra 3:11, and Psalm 136:1. It may be the oldest and most frequently repeated confession in Israelite worship.*

1A psalm for the thanksgiving offering.

Shout to the LORD, all the earth!

²Serve the LORD with gladness!
Come before him with joyful singing!

³Know that the LORD — he is God!
He made us, and we are his —
his people and the flock of his pasture.

⁴Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
his courts with praise!
Give thanks to him; bless his name!

⁵For the LORD is good;
his faithful love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to every generation.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The superscription *mizmor le-todah* ('a psalm for the thanksgiving offering') links this psalm to the sacrificial system. The *todah* was a specific category of peace offering (Leviticus 7:12-15) presented after deliverance from danger — illness, enemies, mortal threat. It was always accompanied by communal celebration and praise. The imperative *hari'u* ('shout!') with *kol ha-arets* ('all the earth') universalizes the thanksgiving: what began as one person's gratitude for deliverance becomes the whole world's response to God.
2. The verb *ivdu* ('serve!') is the same verb used for Israel's slavery in Egypt (Exodus 1:13) — the exodus did not free Israel from service but transferred their service from Pharaoh to God. But this service is *be-simchah* ('with gladness') — not coerced labor but joyful devotion. The verb *bo'u* ('come!') with *lefanav* ('before his face') invites the worshipers into God's presence, and *birnana* ('with joyful singing, with ringing cries') describes how they arrive. The entire verse insists that the worship of God is characterized by delight, not dread.
3. The *ketiv/qere* variant in this verse is one of the most discussed in the Hebrew Bible. The *ketiv* (*ve-lo anachnu*, 'and not we ourselves') denies human self-sufficiency: we did not make ourselves. The *qere* (*ve-lo anachnu*, 'and we are his') affirms divine possession: we belong to God. Both readings are ancient, both are theologically sound, and both are preserved in the Masoretic tradition. We follow the *qere* because the flow of the verse moves from creation to possession to pastoral care.
4. The *she'arim* ('gates') and *chatserot* ('courts') are the physical spaces of the Jerusalem temple. The outer gates led to the courtyards where worshipers gathered. The *todah* and *tehillah* that the worshipers bring are both verbal offerings — words of gratitude and words of praise. In the *todah* sacrifice, the verbal thanksgiving accompanied the physical offering, but the psalm envisions the words themselves as the primary gift.
5. The formula *ki tov ki le-olam chasdo* ('for he is good, for his faithful love endures forever') appears as a liturgical refrain in 2 Chronicles 5:13, 7:3, 20:21, Ezra 3:11, and throughout Psalm 136. It may be the oldest continuous liturgical formula in Jewish worship, predating any written psalm and perhaps going back to the earliest temple worship. When the returned exiles laid the foundation of the second temple, they wept and shouted this formula (Ezra 3:11) — it was the first thing sung when worship resumed.

101

Summary: *A royal psalm attributed to David in which the king declares the moral standards he will uphold in his household and kingdom. The psalm functions as a pledge of governance — David vows to walk with integrity, banish slander and arrogance, surround himself with faithful servants, and purge the wicked from the city of the LORD. It reads like a royal charter of ethics, a king's oath of office before God.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 101 is unique among the psalms because it is neither praise nor lament but a vow. The king does not ask God for anything; he declares what he will do. Every line is a first-person commitment: 'I will sing,' 'I will walk,' 'I will set no worthless thing before my eyes,' 'I will cut off.' The psalm assumes that the king's personal integrity is inseparable from the health of the nation — that a ruler's private conduct shapes public justice. The shift from personal ethics (vv. 1-4) to governmental policy (vv. 5-8) treats them as one continuous fabric. A king who tolerates evil in his own heart will tolerate it in his court.*

Translation Friction: The superscription attributes this to David (le-David), and the content fits a royal context — the references to 'my house,' 'my eyes,' and 'the city of the LORD' suggest a king governing from Jerusalem. However, the psalm's idealistic tone raises questions: does this represent David's actual practice, or an aspiration? Given the narratives of 2 Samuel, where David fails spectacularly in precisely the areas this psalm addresses (Bathsheba, the cover-up, failure to discipline his sons), the psalm reads as either early idealism or deliberate irony. The Hebrew phrase be-qerev beiti ('within my house') becomes painfully pointed when read against 2 Samuel 11-18.

Connections: The psalm's emphasis on the king's moral conduct connects directly to Deuteronomy 17:14-20, the Torah's instructions for Israelite kingship — the king must not multiply wealth or wives and must keep a copy of the Torah before him. Psalm 101 reads like the king's personal response to those instructions. The phrase chesed u-mishpat ('faithful love and justice') in verse 1 echoes the pairing found throughout the prophets (Hosea 6:6, Micah 6:8) — these are the twin pillars of covenant faithfulness. The morning judgment in verse 8 connects to Jeremiah 21:12, where the king is commanded to execute justice every morning.

¹A psalm of David.

Of faithful love and justice I will sing;
to you, O LORD, I will make music.

²I will give careful attention to the way of integrity.
When will you come to me?
I will walk with a whole heart
within my house.

³I will set no worthless thing before my eyes.
The deeds of those who fall away — I hate them;
they will not cling to me.

⁴A twisted heart will turn away from me;
I will not know evil.

⁵Whoever slanders his neighbor in secret —
him I will destroy.
The one with haughty eyes and a swollen heart —
him I cannot endure.

⁶My eyes are on the faithful of the land,
that they may sit with me.
Whoever walks the path of integrity —
he will serve me.

⁷No one who practices deceit
will dwell within my house.
No one who speaks lies
will stand before my eyes.

⁸Every morning I will destroy
all the wicked of the land,
cutting off from the city of the LORD
all who practice iniquity.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The pairing of *chesed* and *mishpat* is foundational in the Hebrew Bible. *Chesed* is God's covenant faithfulness directed downward; *mishpat* is the just order that results when that faithfulness is reflected in human governance. The king who sings of both is committing to embody both.
2. The question *matai tavo elai* ('when will you come to me?') has puzzled translators. Some take it as a parenthetical cry for God's help, others as a condition ('whenever you come to me, you will find me walking in integrity'). The abruptness is likely deliberate — even in the middle of declaring his moral resolve, the king acknowledges that God's presence is what makes integrity possible.
3. The word *tom* ('integrity, wholeness, completeness') shares its root with *tamim* ('blameless'). Walking *be-tom levavi* means conducting oneself from a heart that is undivided, not harboring hidden motives.
4. The word *beliyaal* later becomes a title (Belial) in Second Temple literature and the New Testament (2 Corinthians 6:15) for a figure of wickedness. Here in the psalm it is still an abstract noun meaning 'worthlessness' or 'destruction.' The evolution from adjective to proper name traces how deeply this concept embedded itself in Israel's moral vocabulary.
5. The adjective *iqqesh* ('twisted, crooked, perverse') describes a heart that is bent out of shape — not merely wrong but structurally deformed. The verb *yasur* ('to turn aside, to depart') here means the king will cause such a heart to withdraw from his presence. The phrase *ra lo eda* ('evil I will not know') uses *yada* ('to know') in the sense of intimate acquaintance — the king will not cultivate familiarity with evil.
6. The phrase *rechav levav* ('wide of heart') does not mean generous. In Hebrew, a 'wide heart' is one that has inflated itself — self-aggrandizing, presumptuous, taking up more space than it deserves. English 'proud heart' captures the sense, but 'swollen heart' preserves the physical metaphor of dangerous expansion.
7. The verb *sharat* ('to serve, to minister') is used for the Levites serving in the tabernacle (Numbers 3:6) and for court officials serving the king. The king's household is modeled on the sanctuary — faithful service to the king mirrors faithful service to God.
8. The verb *yikon* (Niphal of *kun*, 'to be established, to stand firm') means the liar will not be established or maintained in the king's presence — he will not have a secure standing. The parallelism is tight: *oseh remiyyah* ('doer of deceit') parallels *dover sheqarim* ('speaker of lies'), and *be-qerev beiti* ('within my house') parallels *le-neged einai* ('before my eyes'). The king's house and the king's gaze are the same zone of accountability.
9. The phrase *ir YHVH* ('city of the LORD') is significant — it identifies Jerusalem as God's city, not merely David's. The king governs on behalf of God, and his judicial actions serve God's holiness. The morning timing connects to ancient Near Eastern court practice, where kings rendered judgments at dawn.

102

Summary: *A prayer of an afflicted person who pours out complaint before the LORD. The psalm moves through three movements: personal suffering described in vivid physical metaphors (vv. 1-12), a declaration that God will arise to rebuild Zion and respond to the destitute (vv. 13-23), and a meditation on human transience set against God's permanence (vv. 24-29). The superscription is unique in the Psalter — it describes a situation rather than naming an author.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 102 is one of the seven traditional penitential psalms, yet it contains no confession of sin. The sufferer is afflicted but not guilty — or at least the psalm never says so. The structural genius lies in how personal lament becomes national hope becomes cosmic theology. The psalmist begins with his own wasting body (bones burning, heart withered like grass, skin clinging to bones) and ends with God founding the heavens and the earth. The shift from 'my days are like a lengthening shadow' (v. 12) to 'You are the same, and your years have no end' (v. 28) is one of the most dramatic theological pivots in the Psalter. Human fragility is not denied but set within a framework of divine permanence. Hebrews 1:10-12 quotes verses 26-28 and applies them to the Son — making this psalm one of the key christological texts drawn from the Psalter.*

Translation Friction: *The superscription *le-ani ki yaatof* ('for the afflicted one when he is faint') does not name David or any other author, making this one of the few psalms with an entirely anonymous, situational heading. The transition from personal lament (vv. 1-12) to national restoration (vv. 13-23) is abrupt — some scholars argue the psalm combines two originally separate compositions. However, the logic is coherent if the psalmist identifies his own restoration with Zion's: when God rebuilds the city, He will also heal the sufferer. The individual and the nation share a single hope.*

Connections: The imagery of withered grass (v. 5, 12) connects to Isaiah 40:6-8 ('all flesh is grass'). The declaration that God founded the earth (v. 26) echoes Isaiah 48:13 and will be quoted in Hebrews 1:10-12 as testimony to Christ's eternal nature. The promise that God will 'look down from His holy height' (v. 20) to hear the groaning of prisoners echoes Psalm 79:11 and Exodus 2:23-25, where God heard the groaning of Israel in Egypt. The rebuilding of Zion (v. 17) connects to the post-exilic hope of Isaiah 60-62.

¹A prayer of the afflicted one, when he grows faint
and pours out his complaint before the LORD.

²O LORD, hear my prayer,
and let my cry come before you.

³Do not hide your face from me
in the day of my distress.
Incline your ear to me;
in the day I call, answer me quickly.

⁴For my days vanish in smoke,
and my bones burn like a furnace.

⁵My heart is struck down and withered like grass,
for I forget to eat my bread.

⁶From the sound of my groaning,
my bones cling to my flesh.

⁷I resemble a desert owl;
I have become like a screech owl among ruins.

⁸I lie awake;
I am like a solitary bird on a rooftop.

⁹All day long my enemies taunt me;
those who mock me use my name as a curse.

¹⁰For I eat ashes as my bread
and mingle my drink with weeping.

¹¹Because of your indignation and your wrath,
for you lifted me up and hurled me down.

¹²My days are like a lengthening shadow,
and I wither like grass.

¹³But you, O LORD, are enthroned forever,
and your name endures to all generations.

¹⁴You will rise and have compassion on Zion,
for it is time to show her favor —
the appointed time has come.

¹⁵For your servants hold dear her stones
and look with compassion on her dust.

¹⁶Then the nations will fear the name of the LORD,
and all the kings of the earth your glory.

¹⁷For the LORD will rebuild Zion;
He will appear in His glory.

¹⁸He has turned toward the prayer of the destitute
and has not despised their plea.

¹⁹Let this be written for a generation to come,
that a people yet to be created may praise the LORD.

²⁰For He looked down from His holy height;
the LORD gazed from heaven to earth,

²¹to hear the groaning of the prisoner,
to set free those condemned to death,

²²that the name of the LORD may be proclaimed in Zion
and His praise in Jerusalem,

²³when peoples gather together,
and kingdoms, to serve the LORD.

²⁴He has broken my strength along the way;
He has cut short my days.

²⁵I say, 'My God, do not take me away
in the middle of my days.'
Your years span all generations.

²⁶Long ago you laid the foundation of the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands.

²⁷They will perish, but you will stand.
All of them will wear out like a garment;
like clothing you will change them, and they will pass away.

²⁸But you are the same,
and your years will never end.

²⁹The children of your servants will dwell secure,
and their offspring will be established before you.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. This verse is the superscription — not part of the prayer itself but a heading that describes the psalm's setting. The verb *yaatof* ('he grows faint, he is overwhelmed') conveys a person at the edge of endurance. The verb *yishpokh* ('he pours out') uses the language of liquid — the sufferer's complaint flows from him like water that cannot be held back. The noun *sicho* ('his complaint, his meditation') comes from *siach*, which can mean a spoken complaint or an inward brooding. This heading is unique in its specificity: it names no author, only a condition.

2. The prayer proper begins with the standard petition formula: YHVH shim'ah tefillati ('LORD, hear my prayer'). The parallelism pairs tefillah ('prayer') with shav'ah ('cry for help') — the second term is more urgent, more desperate than the first. The verb tavo ('let it come') asks that the cry reach God's presence, implying a distance that must be crossed.
3. The phrase al taster panekha ('do not hide your face') is the foundational prayer of the Psalter — God's hidden face means abandonment, and God's turned face means salvation. The urgency intensifies through the verse: from 'hear' to 'do not hide' to 'incline your ear' to maher aneni ('answer me quickly'). The word maher ('quickly, speedily') expresses that the sufferer cannot wait — delay itself is a form of death.
4. The verb kalu (from kalah, 'to be finished, consumed, spent') indicates total depletion. The days are not merely passing; they are being used up, burned away. The word nicharu (from charar, 'to be scorched, to burn') describes dry, intense heat — the bones are desiccated by illness or suffering.
5. The simile ka-esev ('like grass') invokes the Near Eastern image of grass that springs up green and is scorched by the sun within hours. The heart (lev) here is not the organ but the center of vitality and will. The connection between inner devastation and the forgetting of food (shakhachi me-ekhol lachmi) is psychologically precise — grief and suffering suppress appetite. The body refuses sustenance because the will to live has been struck.
6. The verb daveqah ('it clings') is the same verb used in Genesis 2:24 for marital union and in Psalm 101:3 for evil clinging. Here the clinging is skeletal — the bones press against the skin because there is no flesh between them. The person is wasting away. The phrase mi-qol anchati ('from the voice of my groaning') makes the groaning audible, the suffering public. The connection between sound and emaciation is causal: the groaning is so constant and intense that the body itself is being consumed by it.
7. The qa'at midbar ('pelican of the wilderness' in KJV) is more likely a type of owl or solitary bird associated with desolate places. The kos choravot ('owl of ruins, owl of waste places') is a bird that inhabits destroyed buildings and abandoned sites. Both images convey isolation in desolation — the psalmist is not merely alone but alone in a wasteland. The identification of these birds is uncertain; what matters is the theological resonance: both inhabit places where life has withdrawn.
8. The verb shaqadeti ('I keep watch, I lie awake') implies sleepless vigilance — the sufferer cannot rest. The image of a tsippor boded al gag ('a lonely bird on a roof') captures perfect isolation: a single bird perched on the highest point of a house, separated from its flock, exposed to wind and night. The rooftop is the most exposed part of an Israelite house. The bird is both visible and utterly alone.
9. The phrase bi nishba'u ('they swear by me') means the psalmist's misery has become proverbial — people use his name as an oath formula: 'May you become like him.' This is a depth of social humiliation beyond mere insult. The verb cherephuni ('they taunt me') implies public disgrace, and the meholalai ('those who rage against me, my mockers') are those who treat the sufferer as a spectacle of divine punishment.
10. Ashes (epher) are the substance of mourning — the psalmist sits in ashes (like Job) and they have become his food. The image of mixing tears with drink (shiqquai bivkhi masakti) means weeping is so constant that tears literally fall into the cup. These are not separate metaphors but a portrait of a life in which grief has replaced every form of sustenance.
11. The verb nasah ('to lift up') followed by hislikh ('to throw, to hurl') creates a single violent action in two stages. Some interpreters read this as a reference to former prosperity followed by catastrophic loss. The theological honesty is striking — the psalmist holds God responsible without abandoning prayer to God.
12. The tsel natui ('stretched-out shadow, declining shadow') is the shadow of late afternoon, growing longer as the sun descends — it will soon disappear entirely when night falls. The psalmist's remaining life stretches thin like that shadow. The return to the grass metaphor (ka-esev ivash, 'like grass I dry up') closes the personal lament section with the same image that opened it in verse 5. The ring structure emphasizes: the psalmist is dying.
13. The phrase le-olam teshev ('forever you sit enthroned') uses olam in its fullest sense — perpetual, without end. The contrast between the psalmist's shadow-days and God's endless reign is the theological engine that drives the rest of the psalm toward hope.
14. The verb taqum ('you will arise') implies that God has been seated, possibly in judgment or in apparent inaction, and now rises to act. The verb terachem ('you will have compassion') uses the root rachum, connected to rechem ('womb') — God's compassion is maternal, visceral, womb-deep. The phrase et lechennah ('time to show her grace') and ba mo'ed ('the appointed time has come') assert that there is a divinely fixed moment for Zion's restoration, and it has arrived. The psalmist's personal suffering is now linked to national hope.
15. The verb ratsu ('they take pleasure in, they hold dear') means the people love even the rubble of Zion — her stones (avaneih) and her dust (apharah). This is post-destruction language: the city has been reduced to ruins, but its broken stones are precious to the faithful. The word apha ('dust') is the material of desolation and also of creation (Genesis 2:7). Even Zion's dust is beloved. This verse likely reflects the exile or early post-exilic period.
16. The scope expands from Zion to the entire world. When God rebuilds Zion, the nations (goyim) will respond with yir'ah ('fear, reverence'). The parallel between shem YHVH ('the name of the LORD') and kevodekha ('your glory') equates God's name with His manifest presence. The kings of the earth — not merely Israel's neighbors but all earthly rulers — will acknowledge God's kavod.
17. The verb banah ('to build') is the hope of every exile — God will reconstruct what was destroyed. The phrase nir'ah bikhvodo ('He will be seen in His glory') means God's rebuilding of Zion is not merely architectural but theophanic — God Himself will appear. The city is rebuilt because God returns to it.

18. The ha-ar'ar ('the stripped one, the destitute, the naked shrub') is a rare word — it appears in Jeremiah 17:6 as a bush in the desert, stripped bare, without hope. Here it describes people stripped of everything. The verb bazah ('to despise') is what God does not do — He does not look down on the prayer of those who have nothing. This verse reverses the shame the psalmist described earlier: even if enemies despise him, God does not.
19. The phrase dor acharon ('a later generation, a generation to come') combined with am nivra ('a people to be created') gives this verse an almost prophetic quality — the psalm reaches beyond its own moment to address readers who have not yet been born. Every subsequent reader of this psalm fulfills the psalmist's hope.
20. The verb hishqif ('He looked down, He gazed from above') implies bending forward to see — an act of deliberate attention. The phrase mi-merom qodsho ('from the height of His holiness') locates God in the highest point of the cosmic architecture, yet He bends to look at the earth. The verbs hishqif and hibbit ('He looked intently') both emphasize focused, purposeful observation — God is not passively aware but actively watching.
21. The enqat asir ('groaning of the prisoner') echoes Exodus 2:24 and 6:5, where God hears the groaning of Israel in Egypt. The phrase benei temutah ('sons of death, children of death') means those sentenced to die — death is their parentage, their destiny. God's purpose in looking down is not idle surveillance but rescue: lefatte'ach ('to open, to release'). The God who gazes from heaven does so in order to act.
22. The verb lesapper ('to recount, to proclaim, to tell') is the purpose of the entire rescue: God frees the prisoners so that they can tell what He has done. The parallel between shem YHVH ('the name of the LORD') in Zion and tehillato ('His praise') in Jerusalem binds proclamation to place — the restored city is the location where God's acts are celebrated.
23. The vision expands to eschatological scope: be-hiqqavets ammin yachdav ('when peoples are gathered together') — not just Israel but the nations. The word mamlakhot ('kingdoms') pairs with ammin ('peoples') to indicate both populations and political structures. The purpose of this universal gathering is la'avod et YHVH ('to serve the LORD'). The psalm has moved from one sufferer's bones on fire to all the kingdoms of the earth worshipping God. The trajectory is from desolation to cosmic restoration.
24. The psalmist returns to personal lament. The verb innah ('He afflicted, He humbled') attributes the suffering directly to God — not to enemies, not to illness, but to the divine hand. The phrase badderekh ('along the way, on the road') implies the sufferer was cut down mid-journey, before reaching the destination. The verb qittsar ('He shortened') means God truncated the psalmist's life — the full measure of days was not granted.
25. The contrast between 'the middle of my days' and 'your years throughout all generations' is the theological hinge of the psalm's final section. Human life is measured in halves and portions; God's existence is measured in all generations. The psalmist does not resolve this tension — he holds both truths together.
26. The verb yasad ('to found, to establish, to lay a foundation') is used for both the temple and the earth — both are structures God has built. The psalm does not distinguish between creation and architecture; for the Hebrew mind, the cosmos is God's building project.
27. The garment metaphor is quoted in Hebrews 1:11-12 and applied to the Son's superiority over creation. The theological weight is enormous: if even the heavens wear out, then nothing created is permanent — only the Creator endures. The verb chalaf ('to pass away, to change') applies to the heavens what normally applies to human generations.
28. The phrase attah hu ('you are He') became a liturgical formula in later Judaism. It affirms God's unchanging nature — He is the same yesterday, today, and forever, as Hebrews 13:8 will later say of Christ. The psalm's movement from personal suffering to cosmic permanence is complete.
29. The word zera ('seed, offspring') is the covenant term for descendants — the promise to Abraham that his seed would endure. The psalm closes by grounding individual hope in communal continuity: the sufferer may die, but the community of God's servants will persist before God's face.

103

Summary: *David's great hymn of praise to the LORD for His compassion, forgiveness, and faithful love. The psalm opens with a self-summons to bless God ('Bless the LORD, O my soul'), catalogs God's benefits — healing, redemption, satisfaction, renewal — then meditates on God's character as revealed to Moses: compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in faithful love. The central section (vv. 8-14) is the theological heart: God does not treat us as our sins deserve because He remembers that we are dust. The psalm closes with a cosmic call to praise, summoning angels, heavenly hosts, and all creation to bless the LORD.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 103 is the chesed psalm — the word appears four times (vv. 4, 8, 11, 17), and the entire poem is an exposition of what chesed means in practice. The psalm quotes Exodus 34:6-7, the self-revelation of God to Moses after the golden calf disaster, and then extends it: 'He does not deal with us according to our sins' (v. 10). This is grace articulated before the word 'grace' acquired its Christian theological weight. The psalm's movement is striking: it begins with 'my soul' (individual), expands to Israel's history (national), then reaches to heaven's throne and all creation (cosmic). The trajectory is from inward praise to universal doxology. The comparison of human life to grass and flowers (vv. 15-16) — the same imagery as Isaiah 40:6-8 — is not*

pessimistic but liberating: because we are frail, God is gentle with us. Our smallness is not a problem to be solved but a condition that evokes divine tenderness.

Translation Friction: *The superscription le-David is accepted by the text but the psalm's theology of forgiveness is remarkably mature — some scholars see it as post-exilic, reflecting the kind of theological synthesis that emerges after the exile shattered simpler frameworks of reward and punishment. The psalm's use of Exodus 34:6 is selective: it quotes the compassionate attributes but omits the warning that God 'will by no means clear the guilty' (Exodus 34:7b). This is not carelessness but theological choice — the psalmist is emphasizing one dimension of God's character for a specific pastoral purpose. The tension between justice and mercy is not resolved here; mercy is simply celebrated.*

Connections: *Exodus 34:6-7 is the foundational text behind verse 8 — God's self-revelation as rachum ve-channun, erekh appayim ve-rav chesed ('compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love'). This creedal formula is quoted more than any other passage in the Hebrew Bible (Joel 2:13, Jonah 4:2, Nehemiah 9:17, Psalms 86:15, 145:8). The grass imagery in verses 15-16 parallels Isaiah 40:6-8 and 1 Peter 1:24-25. The fatherly compassion of verse 13 anticipates Jesus' parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:20). The psalm's opening and closing phrase — barekhi nafshi et YHVH ('bless the LORD, O my soul') — creates a frame that also opens Psalm 104.*

¹Of David.

Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and all that is within me, bless His holy name.

²Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and do not forget any of His benefits.

³He forgives all your iniquity;
He heals all your diseases.

⁴He redeems your life from the pit;
He crowns you with faithful love and compassion.

⁵He satisfies your life with good things,
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

⁶The LORD works righteousness
and justice for all who are oppressed.

⁷He made His ways known to Moses,
His deeds to the children of Israel.

⁸The LORD is compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in faithful love.

⁹He will not always contend,
nor will He keep His anger forever.

¹⁰He has not dealt with us according to our sins,
nor repaid us according to our iniquities.

¹¹For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is His faithful love toward those who fear Him.

¹²As distant as east is from west,
so far has He removed our transgressions from us.

¹³As a father has compassion on his children,
so the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him.

¹⁴For He knows what we are made of;
He remembers that we are dust.

¹⁵As for a human — his days are like grass;
like a flower of the field, so he blooms.

¹⁶For the wind passes over it and it is gone,
and its place knows it no more.

¹⁷But the faithful love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting
upon those who fear Him,
and His righteousness to children's children,

¹⁸to those who keep His covenant
and remember His precepts to do them.

¹⁹The LORD has established His throne in the heavens,
and His kingdom rules over all.

²⁰Bless the LORD, you His angels,
you mighty ones who do His word,
obeying the voice of His command.

²¹Bless the LORD, all His hosts,
His ministers who do His will.

²²Bless the LORD, all His works,
in every place of His dominion.
Bless the LORD, O my soul.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb *barak* in the Piel means 'to bless, to praise, to kneel before.' When directed toward God, it means to acknowledge His greatness with gratitude. The word *qeravai* ('my inward parts') is anatomical — it refers to the internal organs, the seat of emotion in Hebrew thought. The psalmist wants his liver, his intestines, his kidneys — all the places where emotion is physically felt — to participate in praise.
2. The verb *tishkechi* ('forget') is the great danger — the soul that forgets God's acts loses the basis for praise. The word *gemulav* ('His benefits, His dealings') comes from *gamal* ('to deal with, to repay, to ripen') and includes both acts of kindness and the full weight of God's engagement with the person. The following verses (3-5) will enumerate these benefits in a catalog of divine generosity.
3. The verb *salach* ('to forgive') occurs only with God as subject in the Hebrew Bible — it is a divine prerogative. This distinguishes biblical forgiveness from human pardoning. When God forgives, something happens that no human authority can accomplish.
4. The *go'el* institution (Leviticus 25, Ruth 3-4) is the legal framework here — God acts as the nearest kinsman who has both the right and the obligation to redeem. The word *shachat* ('pit') can mean either a physical pit, the grave, or destruction. In context, it means God rescues from death itself.
4. Register departure: *go'el* rendered as 'redeems' (verbal) rather than default nominal 'kinsman-redeemer'/'Redeemer' because the Hebrew uses the participial form *ha-go'el* — 'the one who redeems' — functioning as a present-tense verb describing God's ongoing redemptive action.
5. The verb *masbia* ('He satisfies') means filling to the point of completeness — no lack, no hunger, no unfulfilled desire. The word *edyekh* is debated: it may mean 'your ornament' (from *adi*, 'adornment'), 'your duration' (from *ad*, 'perpetuity'), or 'your mouth' (some ancient versions). We render 'your

life' to capture the fullness of what God satisfies. The eagle (nesher) metaphor draws on the observation that eagles molt and regrow feathers, appearing to be renewed. The psalmist's youth (ne'urayekhi) is refreshed by God's provision — age and decay are reversed by divine generosity.

6. The plural tsedaqot ('righteous acts, acts of justice') emphasizes that God's righteousness is not a static attribute but a series of specific, concrete actions on behalf of the oppressed (ashuqim). The word ashuqim ('oppressed, crushed, exploited') refers to those ground down by more powerful people. God's justice is not impartial in the abstract sense — it is biased toward the oppressed, because they are the ones who need it.
7. The distinction between derakhav ('His ways') and alilotav ('His deeds') is important: Israel saw what God did (the plagues, the sea crossing, the manna), but Moses knew why God did it (His compassion, His faithfulness, His patience). Ways are deeper than deeds. This verse prepares for the Exodus 34:6 quotation in verse 8.
8. The phrase erekh appayim ('slow to anger') is literally 'long of nostrils.' In Hebrew, anger is expressed through the nose — rapid breathing, flared nostrils. A person who is 'long of nostrils' takes a long time to get angry. Applied to God, it means His default posture is patience, not wrath.
8. The psalm quotes Exodus 34:6 but omits the continuation in 34:7b — 'who will by no means clear the guilty.' This selective quotation is theologically deliberate: the psalmist is celebrating mercy, not denying justice. The full character of God includes both; this psalm magnifies one.
9. The verb yariv ('He contends, He brings a case') is legal language — God is pictured as a prosecutor who eventually drops the case. The verb yittor ('He keeps, He bears a grudge') means to maintain anger over time. The psalm's claim is radical: God's anger has an expiration date. He does not nurse grievances or hold eternal grudges. This is not a denial of divine justice but an assertion that mercy has the last word.
10. The parallelism between chata'einu ('our sins,' from chata, 'to miss the mark') and avonoteinu ('our iniquities,' from avah, 'to bend, to twist, to be crooked') uses two different Hebrew words for moral failure. Sin is missing the target; iniquity is being bent out of shape. God responds to neither with what they deserve.
11. The verb gavar ('to prevail, to be mighty') applied to chesed means that faithful love is not passive — it actively prevails over obstacles, over sin, over the distance between heaven and earth. The spatial metaphor makes an abstract quality vivid: chesed is as vast as the sky.
12. The three sin-words in the psalm — chet (v. 10, missing the mark), avon (v. 10, crookedness), and pesha (v. 12, rebellion) — cover the full spectrum of human moral failure. God addresses all three: He does not repay chet or avon proportionally (v. 10), and He removes pesha entirely (v. 12).
13. The father metaphor is significant in a culture where the father held absolute authority over the household. A father's compassion is not weakness but the tender side of full authority — the father who could punish chooses to show mercy. This verse anticipates the explanation in verse 14: the father knows what his children are made of.
14. The word yetser will later acquire theological weight in rabbinic literature as yetser ha-ra ('the evil inclination') and yetser ha-tov ('the good inclination'). Here it simply means 'what we are formed from, our constitution.' God is a potter who knows the limitations of His clay.
15. The word enosh ('a human, a mortal') emphasizes frailty — it is the word for humanity at its most vulnerable. The comparison to chatsir ('grass') and tsits ha-sadeh ('flower of the field') draws on the Palestinian landscape where wildflowers appear after rain and are scorched by the hot east wind (the hamsin) within days. The verb yatsits ('he blossoms') uses the same root as tsits ('flower') — the human blooms briefly and brilliantly, but the bloom does not last.
16. The ruach ('wind, breath, spirit') that destroys the flower is the same word for the life-breath that God gives. Wind gives life and takes it away. The phrase ve-einenu ('and it is not, and he is no more') is absolute — the person simply ceases to be present. The clause ve-lo yakkivenu od meqomo ('and its place will not recognize it again') personifies the location: the very ground where the person stood will not remember them. The imagery is not bitter but factual — this is what dust does.
17. The fourth and climactic use of chesed in the psalm. The phrase me-olam ve-ad olam is the strongest temporal expression in Hebrew — it means 'from perpetuity to perpetuity.' Chesed is set on the same timescale as God Himself.
18. This verse qualifies the promise of verse 17. The chesed that spans eternity is directed toward those who shomerei verito ('keep His covenant') and zokherei piqudav ('remember His precepts'). The verb zakar ('to remember') paired with la'asotam ('to do them') means that remembering is not intellectual but active — you remember the commandments by performing them. The covenant framework is explicit: chesed operates within covenant relationship.
19. The verb hekchin ('He has established, He has prepared') uses kun ('to be firm, stable') in the Hiphil — God's throne is not temporary furniture but a permanent fixture of the cosmic architecture. The phrase malkhuto bakkol mashalah ('His kingdom over everything rules') asserts absolute sovereignty. The scope is universal: bakkol means 'over everything' — not just Israel, not just the earth, but the entire created order. This verse provides the theological basis for the cosmic praise that follows.
20. The call to praise expands from the psalmist's soul to the angelic realm. The mal'akhav ('His angels, His messengers') are giborei koach ('mighty ones of power') — beings of immense strength. Yet their power is exercised in obedience: osei devaro ('doers of His word'), lishmo'a be-qol devaro ('listening to the voice of His word'). Angelic might is defined by submission to God's commands. The strongest beings in the universe are characterized by their obedience.
21. The tseva'av ('His hosts, His armies') expands from individual angels to the entire heavenly army. The mesharetav ('His ministers') uses sharat, the verb for priestly or courtly service — the same word used in Psalm 101:6 for those who serve the king. The phrase osei retsono ('doers of His will, His pleasure') defines service as alignment with God's desire. The heavenly hierarchy is summoned to praise.

22. The return to barekhi nafshi et YHVH creates an inclusio — the literary device of beginning and ending with the same phrase. The psalm has traveled from the individual soul through Israel's history, through God's cosmic character, through heaven's angels, through all creation, and back to the single soul. The message is clear: your private praise participates in the praise of the universe.

104

Summary: *The great creation psalm — a poetic retelling of Genesis 1 that follows the same sequence (light, sky, waters, land, luminaries, sea creatures, humans) but transforms it from narrative prose into ecstatic hymn. God stretches out the heavens like a tent, rides on the clouds, sets the earth on its foundations, sends springs into valleys, causes grass and wine and bread and oil for human sustenance, appoints the moon for seasons, and fills the sea with creatures beyond counting. The psalm ends with a prayer that sinners vanish from the earth and a return to the opening self-summons: 'Bless the LORD, O my soul.'*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 104 has been compared to the Egyptian Hymn to the Aten attributed to Pharaoh Akhenaten (14th century BCE), and the parallels are striking — both celebrate the sun, the provision of water, the diversity of creatures, and the dependence of all life on the deity. Whether there is direct literary dependence or a shared ancient Near Eastern tradition of creation hymns is debated. What distinguishes Psalm 104 is its theological integration: creation is not autonomous but continuously dependent on God's breath (ruach). Verse 29 is the psalm's theological center: 'When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to dust. When you send forth your spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground.' Creation is not a past event but an ongoing act — God sustains everything moment by moment. The psalm's vision is not deistic (God made it and left) but panentheistic in the broad sense: God is actively present in every spring, every cloud, every lion's roar, every ship on the sea.*

Translation Friction: *The psalm has no superscription attributing it to David or any other author in the Hebrew text (LXX adds 'of David'). The relationship to Genesis 1 is structural but not slavish — the psalm rearranges some elements and adds others (wine, oil, storks, rock badgers) that Genesis does not mention. The prayer in verse 35 that sinners be consumed from the earth strikes an unexpected note in a creation hymn — why end a celebration of cosmic beauty with a wish for the wicked to vanish? The answer may be that sin is the one element that does not fit the created order; it is the dissonance in the symphony, and the psalmist wants the music to be pure.*

Connections: *The creation sequence follows Genesis 1 closely: light (v. 2), sky/waters divided (vv. 3-6), dry land (vv. 7-9), vegetation (vv. 14-17), luminaries (v. 19), sea creatures (v. 25-26), sustenance for all (vv. 27-28). The breath theology of verses 29-30 connects to Genesis 2:7 (God breathes life into the human), Ecclesiastes 12:7 (the spirit returns to God), and Job 34:14-15 (if God withdrew His spirit, all flesh would perish). The Leviathan reference in verse 26 connects to Job 41 and Isaiah 27:1. Paul's speech in Acts 17:25-28 ('in Him we live and move and have our being') echoes this psalm's vision of continuous divine sustenance.*

¹Bless the LORD, O my soul.

O LORD my God, you are exceedingly great;
you are clothed with splendor and majesty.

²He wraps Himself in light as a garment;
He stretches out the heavens like a tent curtain.

³He lays the beams of His upper chambers on the waters;
He makes the clouds His chariot;
He walks on the wings of the wind.

⁴He makes winds His messengers,
flaming fire His servants.

⁵He set the earth on its foundations,
so that it will never be shaken.

⁶You draped the deep over it as with a garment;
the waters stood above the mountains.

⁷At your rebuke they fled;
at the sound of your thunder they rushed away.

⁸Mountains rose, valleys sank down,
to the place you appointed for them.

⁹You set a boundary they cannot cross;
they will not return to cover the earth.

¹⁰He sends springs into the valleys;
they flow between the mountains.

¹¹They water every beast of the field;
the wild donkeys quench their thirst.

¹²Beside them the birds of the heavens dwell;
from among the branches they sing.

¹³He waters the mountains from His upper chambers;
the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your works.

¹⁴He causes grass to grow for the livestock
and plants for human labor,
bringing food from the earth.

¹⁵And wine to gladden the human heart,
oil to make the face shine,
and bread to sustain the human heart.

¹⁶The trees of the LORD drink their fill —
the cedars of Lebanon that He planted.

¹⁷There the birds build their nests;
the stork — the cypresses are her home.

¹⁸The high mountains belong to the wild goats;
the cliffs are a refuge for the rock badgers.

¹⁹He made the moon for appointed times;
the sun knows its setting.

²⁰You appoint darkness and it becomes night,
when every creature of the forest stirs.

²¹The young lions roar for prey,
seeking their food from God.

²²The sun rises — they withdraw
and lie down in their dens.

²³Humans go out to their work
and to their labor until evening.

²⁴How many are your works, O LORD!
In wisdom you made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.

²⁵There is the sea, vast and wide,
teeming with creatures beyond number —
living things both small and great.

²⁶There the ships travel,
and Leviathan, whom you formed to play in it.

²⁷All of them look to you
to give them their food in its time.

²⁸When you give to them, they gather;
when you open your hand, they are filled with good.

²⁹When you hide your face, they are terrified;
when you take away their breath, they die
and return to their dust.

³⁰When you send forth your spirit, they are created,
and you renew the face of the ground.

³¹May the glory of the LORD endure forever;
may the LORD rejoice in His works.

³²He looks at the earth and it trembles;
He touches the mountains and they smoke.

³³I will sing to the LORD as long as I live;
I will make music to my God while I exist.

³⁴May my meditation be pleasing to Him;
I will rejoice in the LORD.

³⁵Let sinners vanish from the earth,
and let the wicked be no more.
Bless the LORD, O my soul.
Praise the LORD!

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The clothing metaphor is central to the psalm: God wraps Himself in light (v. 2), stretches out the heavens like a tent curtain (v. 2), and makes clouds His chariot (v. 3). Creation is God's wardrobe — the visible expression of His invisible nature.
2. The verb *natah* ('to stretch out') applied to the heavens appears in Isaiah 40:22, 42:5, 44:24, and Job 9:8. It became a standard theological formula: God 'stretches out' the sky. The tent curtain metaphor suggests that the heavens are not a permanent structure but a fabric God spread — and could, presumably, fold up again (as Psalm 102:27 suggests).
3. The verb *meqareh* ('lays beams, constructs with beams') uses architectural language — God builds His upper rooms (*aliyyotav*) on the cosmic waters above the firmament. The ancient Near Eastern cosmology places water above the sky-dome, and God's palace sits upon those waters. The clouds are His *rekhuvo* ('His chariot') and the wind (*ruach*) is His steed. The imagery is of a divine king moving through His realm with cosmic elements as His transportation.
4. The LXX reads 'He makes His angels spirits and His ministers a flame of fire,' and Hebrews 1:7 follows this reading to argue for the Son's superiority over angels. The Hebrew text in its creation-hymn context more likely means that natural forces — wind and fire — serve as God's agents in the world. Both readings are theologically productive.
5. The verb *yasad* ('to found, to lay a foundation') pictures God as a master builder. The *mekhoneyha* ('its foundations, its bases') are the pillars or supports on which the earth rests — the ancient cosmological image of the earth as a structure built upon foundations (see also Job 38:4-6). The promise *bal timmot olam va-ed* ('it will not be moved forever and ever') asserts the permanence of God's construction. The earth is stable because God made it so.
6. The *tehom* ('the deep') is the primordial ocean of Genesis 1:2 — the watery chaos that covered everything before God separated the waters. The psalm pictures this as a garment (*kallevush*) that covered the earth — the deep wrapped the world like a robe. The phrase *al harim ya'amdu mayim* ('above the mountains the waters stood') describes the pre-creation state: even the highest points on earth were submerged. The following verses will describe God commanding these waters to retreat.
7. The verb *yenusun* ('they fled') and *yechafezun* ('they hurried, they rushed') give the waters personality — they respond to God's *ga'aratekha* ('your rebuke') like soldiers scattering before a commander. The *qol ra'amekha* ('voice of your thunder') is God's weapon: His voice is thunder, and thunder drives the waters back. The retreat of the primordial waters is not a gradual process but a panicked flight before divine authority.
8. The subject could be the waters or the landforms. We read it as the landscape reshaping itself in response to God's command: mountains ascend (*ya'alu harim*) and valleys descend (*yerdu veqa'ot*). The phrase *el maqom zeh yasadta lahem* ('to the place you founded for them') means each feature of the landscape has an assigned position. Geography is not random but ordered — God placed each mountain and valley where it belongs.
9. God sets a *gevu* ('boundary, border, limit') for the waters. The waters are not destroyed but contained — they have a territory they must not exceed. The phrase *bal yeshuvun lekhasot ha-arets* ('they will not return to cover the earth') is a creation covenant: God promises that the primordial flood state will not recur. This echoes the Noahic covenant in Genesis 9:11, though the psalm frames it as a creation ordinance rather than a post-flood promise.
10. The scene shifts from primordial cosmology to living landscape. God *meshalleach ma'ananim* ('sends forth springs') — the verb *shalach* means to dispatch on a mission. The springs are agents sent by God to water the earth. The *nachalim* ('wadis, valleys, ravines') are the channels through which the water flows, and the springs run *bein harim* ('between the mountains'). The water that was chaos in verse 6 is now life-giving irrigation, domesticated by divine purpose.
11. The springs serve the animals: *kol chaito sadai* ('every living thing of the field'). The specific example — *pera'im* ('wild donkeys') — highlights the most independent, untamed creatures of the steppe. Even they depend on God's springs. The verb *yishberu* ('they break, they quench') applied to thirst means to shatter it, to end it completely. God provides for creatures that serve no human purpose — the wild donkey is useless to agriculture, yet God waters it.
12. The springs create habitat: the birds of the heavens (of *ha-shamayim*) settle beside the water sources. The phrase *mi-bein ofayim* ('from among the foliage, the branches') locates the birds in the trees that grow near water. The verb *yittenu qol* ('they give voice, they sing') is the birds' response to God's provision — their singing is an unconscious form of praise, a natural doxology that the psalmist recognizes as worship.
13. God waters the mountains from His *aliyyotav* ('His upper rooms') — the same celestial chambers mentioned in verse 3, where God laid beams on the waters. Rain falls from God's palace. The phrase *mi-peri ma'asekha* ('from the fruit of your works') means the earth's satisfaction comes from what God produces — rain is God's 'fruit.' The verb *tisba* ('is satisfied') uses the same root as verse 5's *mesabbe'a* — God satisfies both human desire and the earth itself.
14. The verb *matsmia'ch* (Hiphil of *tsamach*, 'to sprout, to cause to grow') credits God with agriculture. The *chatsir* ('grass') serves the *behemah* ('livestock, cattle, domestic animals'), and the *esev* ('plants, herbs, vegetation') serves the *avodat ha-adam* ('the labor/service of humans'). The phrase *lehotsi lechem min ha-arets* ('to bring forth bread from the earth') is the purpose of human agricultural labor — but the underlying cause is God's growth. Humans work, but God makes things grow.

15. Wine, oil, and bread are the three staples of the Mediterranean agricultural economy and the three elements of festive celebration. The psalm treats them as divine gifts, not human achievements. God causes the growth; humans harvest the result. The theological point is that even the most ordinary meal is sustained by God's creative power.
16. The atsei YHVH ('trees of the LORD') are trees so massive and ancient that they can only be God's own planting. The cedars of Lebanon (arzei Levanon) were the tallest, most majestic trees known to the ancient Israelite world. The verb yisbe'u ('they are satisfied, they drink their fill') applies the language of contentment to trees — they too are recipients of God's provision. The clause asher nata ('which He planted') attributes their existence to God's direct action. No human planted the cedars of Lebanon; God did.
17. The cedars provide habitat. The tsipporim ('birds') nest in them, and the chasidah ('stork') makes her home in the beroshim ('cypresses, fir trees'). The word chasidah is from the root chesed — the stork is literally 'the faithful one,' named for its attentive care of its young. Even the naming of animals reflects covenantal vocabulary. The detail is ecological: tall trees house specific birds, and the psalm delights in this specificity.
18. The ye'elim ('wild goats, ibex') inhabit the highest, most inaccessible peaks; the shefannim ('rock badgers, hyrax') hide in the cliff crevices. Both are creatures that serve no agricultural purpose and live beyond human reach. Yet God provides habitat for them. The psalm's ecological vision is non-utilitarian: creation exists not merely for human benefit but because God delights in its diversity.
19. The yareach ('moon') serves le-mo'adim ('for appointed times, for festivals'). The Hebrew liturgical calendar is lunar — the mo'adim (the festivals of Leviticus 23) are determined by the moon's phases. The moon is not merely decorative but functional in God's worship system. The sun (shemesh) yada mevo'o ('knows its going down') — the sun is personified as knowing when to set. The celestial bodies are obedient servants who know their schedule.
20. God sets (tashet) the darkness — choshekh is not an absence but an appointment. Night is not the failure of day but a purposeful creation. The phrase bo tirmosh kol chayto ya'ar ('in it every beast of the forest creeps about') means night belongs to the animals — it is their time to emerge, hunt, and move. The psalm's vision includes the nocturnal world as part of God's good order.
21. The kephirim ('young lions') roar (sho'agim) for their prey (taraph). The psalm interprets their hunting as prayer: u-levaqesh me-El okhlam ('and to seek from God their food'). The lion's roar is, in the psalm's theology, a petition to God for sustenance. Every predator, in the act of hunting, is unconsciously asking God for dinner. This is radical theological ecology: the food chain is a prayer chain.
22. At dawn, the nocturnal creatures retreat. The verb ye'asefun ('they gather themselves, they withdraw') and yirbbatsun ('they crouch, they lie down') describe the ordered transition from night to day. The me'onotam ('their dens, their lairs') are their assigned places. Night and day each have their inhabitants, and the rotation is seamless. The psalm presents the 24-hour cycle as a choreographed performance.
23. The human appears in the psalm for the first time since verse 15 — and the role is modest. Humans go out to work (le-fo'olo) and labor (la'avodato) until evening (adei arev). The human occupies one slot in the daily cycle: the daytime shift. Lions hunt at night; humans work by day. The psalm does not privilege human activity — it is one part of a larger pattern. The word adam ('human') is generic, not a name.
24. The word chokmah ('wisdom') connects this psalm to the wisdom tradition — Proverbs 8:22-31 pictures wisdom as God's companion in creation. The psalm affirms that the created order is wise, not merely powerful. The diversity of life is evidence of intelligence, not chaos.
25. The zeh hayyam gadol u-rechav yadayim ('this sea, great and broad of hands/extent') introduces the ocean as a marvel. The phrase ein mispar ('without number') means the sea creatures are uncountable — not because the psalmist is lazy but because the abundance exceeds human inventory. The juxtaposition of qetannot im gedolot ('small with great') highlights the range: from plankton to whale, the sea contains every scale of life.
26. The word Livyatan (from lavah, 'to twist, to coil') is the great sea serpent of ancient Near Eastern mythology. In Ugaritic texts, Lotan is the seven-headed chaos dragon defeated by Baal. In Isaiah 27:1, God will slay Leviathan with a sword. But in this psalm, Leviathan plays in the sea like a dolphin. The psalm has domesticated cosmic chaos through divine humor.
27. The verb yesabberu ('they look expectantly, they wait') pictures all creatures — from rock badgers to Leviathan — turning their faces toward God and waiting. The phrase latet okhlam be-itto ('to give their food in its season') means God feeds each creature at the right time. The psalm's vision of universal dependence is both ecological and theological: every feeding event in nature is God's act of provision.
28. The two clauses establish a direct chain: God gives (titten), creatures gather (yilqotun); God opens His hand (tiftach yadekha), creatures are satisfied with good (yisbe'un tov). The hand of God is the source — when it opens, abundance flows; when it closes, scarcity follows. The verb laqat ('to gather, to glean') is the verb used for gathering manna in Exodus 16. All food-gathering in all of nature is a form of manna-gathering.
29. The verb asaph ('to gather, to collect') applied to ruach means God retrieves the breath of life He distributed. Life is a loan, not a possession. The triad — hiding face, gathering breath, returning to dust — describes the mechanics of death as a divine act, not a natural process. God is as involved in death as in life.
30. The verb bara appears only with God as subject in the Hebrew Bible. Its use here means that every new generation of creatures is a genuine act of creation, not merely biological reproduction. The psalm collapses the distinction between original creation and ongoing sustenance — both are the work of God's ruach.
31. The phrase yehi khevod YHVH le-olam ('let the glory of the LORD be forever') is a wish that God's kavod — His manifest splendor — never diminishes. The parallel line — yismach YHVH be-ma'asav ('let the LORD rejoice in His works') — pictures God delighting in creation. The verb samach ('to rejoice') applied to God means the Creator takes pleasure in what He has made. This echoes Genesis 1:31: 'God saw everything that He

had made, and it was very good.' The psalm wants that divine delight to continue.

32. The God who plays with Leviathan and sends springs for birds can also make the earth quake with a glance (hamabbir la-arets vatir'ad) and set mountains smoking with a touch (yigga beharim veye'eshanu). The verbs are instantaneous: God looks — the earth trembles; God touches — the mountains erupt. The psalm reminds the listener that the gentle provider of verses 10-28 is also the terrifying Lord of Sinai (Exodus 19:18). Power and tenderness are not contradictions in God.
33. The psalmist pledges lifelong praise: be-chayyai ('in my life, as long as I live') and be-odi ('while I still exist, while I have being'). The word od ('still, yet, continuance') acknowledges that existence is temporary — the psalmist knows from verse 29 that his breath is on loan. The response to borrowed breath is praise: I will use every breath I have to sing.
34. The verb ye'erav ('may it be sweet, pleasing') expresses the hope that the psalmist's sichi ('meditation, musing, complaint') will be acceptable to God — that it will taste good to Him, like a pleasing sacrifice. The psalmist then declares anokhi esmach ba-YHVH ('I, I will rejoice in the LORD') — the emphatic pronoun anokhi adds personal force. This is the psalmist's individual response to the cosmic panorama: joy in God.
35. The appearance of halelu Yah ('praise the LORD') here is the first occurrence of this liturgical phrase in the Psalter's final collection. It will become the signature exclamation of Psalms 146-150. Some scholars attach the halelu Yah to the beginning of Psalm 105 rather than the end of 104 — the Masoretic text places it here.

105

Summary: *A historical psalm that retells Israel's story from Abraham through the exodus and conquest, emphasizing God's faithfulness to His covenant promise. The psalm moves through the patriarchal wanderings, Joseph's rise in Egypt, the plagues, the wilderness provision, and the gift of the land — all driven by one engine: God remembered His holy word to Abraham. Unlike Psalm 106, which catalogs Israel's failures, Psalm 105 focuses entirely on God's faithfulness. It is a hymn of divine reliability.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 105 is the positive mirror of Psalm 106. Where 106 will recount Israel's repeated failures and rebellions, 105 tells the same history with Israel's sins completely omitted. There is no golden calf, no grumbling, no refusal to enter the land. This is not dishonesty but theological focus: the psalm's purpose is to celebrate what God did, not to account for what Israel did wrong. The controlling verse is verse 8: 'He remembers His covenant forever, the word He commanded for a thousand generations.' Every event in the psalm — Joseph's imprisonment, the plagues, the wilderness wandering — is interpreted as God keeping a promise He made to Abraham. History is covenant fulfillment. The first fifteen verses of this psalm appear in 1 Chronicles 16:8-22 as part of the song David composed when the ark was brought to Jerusalem.*

Translation Friction: *The psalm's selective retelling raises questions: by omitting Israel's failures entirely, does it distort history? The answer depends on genre. A hymn of praise is not a balanced historical account; it is a celebration of one aspect of reality. The psalm also modifies the plague sequence from Exodus — the order differs, and the fifth and sixth plagues (livestock disease, boils) are omitted entirely. The psalmist is not bound to Exodus's sequence but adapts the tradition for poetic and liturgical purposes.*

Connections: *Verses 1-15 parallel 1 Chronicles 16:8-22. The covenant with Abraham (vv. 9-11) draws on Genesis 12:1-3, 15:18-21, and 17:1-8. The Joseph narrative (vv. 17-22) condenses Genesis 37-41. The plague sequence (vv. 28-36) rearranges Exodus 7-12. The wilderness provision (vv. 39-41) draws on Exodus 13:21, 16:1-36, and 17:1-7. The gift of the land (v. 44) fulfills the promise of Genesis 15:18. The psalm's final purpose statement — 'that they might keep His statutes and observe His laws' (v. 45) — connects the historical narrative to Torah obedience.*

1Give thanks to the LORD, call on His name;
make His deeds known among the peoples.

2Sing to Him, make music to Him;
meditate on all His wonders.

3Boast in His holy name;
let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.

⁴Seek the LORD and His strength;
seek His face continually.

⁵Remember the wonders He has done,
His signs and the judgments of His mouth,

⁶O offspring of Abraham His servant,
children of Jacob, His chosen ones.

⁷He is the LORD our God;
His decrees are in all the earth.

⁸He remembers His covenant forever,
the word He commanded for a thousand generations,

⁹the covenant He cut with Abraham,
and His oath to Isaac,

¹⁰He established it for Jacob as a statute,
for Israel as an everlasting covenant,

¹¹saying, 'To you I will give the land of Canaan,
as your allotted inheritance.'

¹²When they were few in number,
very few, and strangers in it.

¹³They wandered from nation to nation,
from one kingdom to another people.

¹⁴He allowed no one to oppress them;
He rebuked kings on their account,

¹⁵'Do not touch my anointed ones,
and do my prophets no harm.'

¹⁶He called a famine upon the land;
He broke every staff of bread.

¹⁷He had sent a man ahead of them —
Joseph, sold as a slave.

¹⁸They afflicted his feet with shackles;
iron entered his soul.

¹⁹Until the time His word came to pass,
the word of the LORD refined him.

²⁰The king sent and released him —
the ruler of peoples set him free.

²¹He made him lord of his household
and ruler over all his possessions,

²²to bind his officials at will
and to teach his elders wisdom.

²³Then Israel came to Egypt;
Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham.

²⁴He made His people very fruitful
and made them stronger than their adversaries.

²⁵He turned their hearts to hate His people,
to plot cunningly with His servants.

²⁶He sent Moses His servant,
and Aaron His chosen one.

²⁷They performed His signs among them,
wonders in the land of Ham.

²⁸He sent darkness and made it dark;
they did not rebel against His word.

²⁹He turned their waters to blood
and killed their fish.

³⁰Their land swarmed with frogs,
even in the chambers of their kings.

³¹He spoke, and swarms of flies came,
and gnats throughout their territory.

³²He gave them hail instead of rain,
flaming fire throughout their land.

³³He struck their vines and fig trees
and shattered the trees of their territory.

³⁴He spoke, and locusts came,
and young locusts without number.

³⁵They devoured every plant in their land
and ate the fruit of their soil.

³⁶He struck every firstborn in their land,
the firstfruits of all their strength.

³⁷He brought them out with silver and gold,
and not one among His tribes stumbled.

³⁸Egypt was glad when they departed,
for dread of them had fallen upon them.

³⁹He spread out a cloud for a covering
and fire to give light at night.

⁴⁰They asked, and He brought quail;
He satisfied them with bread from heaven.

⁴¹He opened the rock and water gushed out;
it flowed through the desert as a river.

⁴²For He remembered His holy word,
His promise to Abraham His servant.

⁴³He brought His people out with joy,
His chosen ones with shouts of gladness.

⁴⁴He gave them the lands of the nations,
and they took possession of what peoples had labored for,

⁴⁵so that they might keep His statutes
and observe His laws.
Praise the LORD!

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The opening imperative *hodu* ('give thanks, confess, acknowledge') sets the psalm's tone: public testimony. The verb *qir'u vishmo* ('call on His name') means to invoke God in worship. The phrase *hodu va-ammim alilotav* ('make known among the peoples His deeds') extends the audience beyond Israel — God's acts are to be proclaimed to the nations. This verse is identical to 1 Chronicles 16:8.
2. Three imperatives: *shiru* ('sing'), *zammeru* ('make music'), *sichu* ('meditate, speak about'). The word *nifle'otav* ('His wonders') from *pala* ('to be extraordinary, to be beyond comprehension') refers to acts so remarkable they exceed normal categories. The rest of the psalm will enumerate these wonders.
3. The verb *hithalelu* ('boast, glory in') means to make God's name the basis of one's confidence. The phrase *lev mevaqshei YHVH* ('the heart of those who seek the LORD') identifies the psalm's audience: not casual observers but active seekers. Their reward is joy (*yismach*).
4. Two verbs for seeking: *dirshu* (from *darash*, 'to inquire, to seek out') and *baqqeshu* (from *baqash*, 'to seek, to request'). The first implies investigation, the second implies desire. God's *uzzo* ('His strength') and *panav* ('His face') are the objects — the seeker pursues both God's power and His presence. The word *tamid* ('continually, always') means this seeking has no endpoint.
5. The imperative *zikhru* ('remember') is the psalm's operating command — what follows is the content of Israel's memory. The *nifle'otav* ('His wonders'), *mofetav* ('His signs, His portents'), and *mishpetei phiv* ('the judgments of His mouth') form a three-part catalog: extraordinary acts, authenticating signs, and spoken verdicts. God acts, God signals, God speaks.
6. The psalm addresses its audience: *zera Avraham avdo* ('seed of Abraham His servant') and *benei Ya'aqov bechirav* ('children of Jacob His chosen'). The terms *avdo* ('His servant') and *bechirav* ('His chosen ones') establish Israel's identity as rooted in divine election, not human merit. Abraham was chosen; Jacob was chosen. The psalm will demonstrate that God's faithfulness to these chosen ones drove the entire history.
7. The confession *hu YHVH Eloheinu* ('He is the LORD our God') is both identity statement and loyalty oath. The phrase *be-khol ha-arets mishpatav* ('in all the earth are His judgments') asserts universal jurisdiction — God's authority extends beyond Israel to the entire world. The God who chose Abraham is also the God of all nations.
8. The verb *tsivvah* ('He commanded') applied to a covenant word means God's promise has the force of a command — it will be fulfilled because God has ordered it so. The promise is not a wish or a hope but a divine decree.
9. The verb *karat* ('He cut') is the standard Hebrew for making a covenant — from the ritual of cutting an animal in two and passing between the halves (Genesis 15:9-18). The *shevu'ato* ('His oath') to Isaac (Genesis 26:3-4) means God bound Himself by oath to the second generation. The covenant is both cut and sworn — doubly binding.

10. The verb *ya'amidehah* ('He established it, He made it stand') uses *amad* ('to stand') in the Hiphil — God caused the covenant to stand firm for Jacob. The designation *le-choq* ('as a statute') gives the covenant the force of law. The phrase *berit olam* ('everlasting covenant') removes any time limit. Three patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob), three covenant terms (covenant, oath, statute), three generations of confirmation.
11. The covenant content is now quoted: *lekha etten et erets Kena'an* ('to you I will give the land of Canaan'). The phrase *chevel nachalatkhem* ('the portion of your inheritance') uses *chevel* ('a measured cord, a boundary line, a lot') — the land is surveyed and assigned. The word *nachalah* ('inheritance') means the land is not earned or purchased but received as a family estate. This is the promise that drives the next thirty-four verses of history.
12. The phrase *metei mispar* ('people of number, countable people') means the patriarchs were so few you could count them. The word *kim'at* ('very few, hardly any') intensifies — they were almost nothing. And they were *garim* ('sojourners, resident aliens') in the very land promised to them. The contrast between the promise ('I will give you this land') and the reality (a handful of homeless wanderers) is the psalm's first exhibit of faith: God made the promise when fulfillment seemed impossible.
13. The verb *vayyithalekhu* ('they walked about, they wandered') describes the patriarchal life as perpetual motion — from nation to nation (*mi-goi el goi*), from kingdom to people (*mi-mamlakhah el am acher*). Abraham went from Ur to Canaan to Egypt; Isaac from Beer-sheba to Gerar; Jacob from Canaan to Haran to Egypt. The landless wandering is the context for God's protection described in the next verses.
14. God's protection of the vulnerable patriarchs: *lo hinnia'ch adam le-oshqam* ('He did not permit anyone to oppress them'). The verb *asaq* ('to oppress, to exploit') is the word for economic and political exploitation. God intervened directly: *vayyokhach aleihem melakhim* ('He rebuked kings on their behalf'). The specific references are Pharaoh (Genesis 12:17) and Abimelech (Genesis 20:3-7) — powerful rulers warned by God not to harm the patriarchs.
15. God's warning to the kings is quoted: *al tigg'u vimshichai* ('do not touch my anointed ones'). The word *meshichai* ('my anointed ones') is remarkable — the patriarchs are called 'anointed' (*mashiach*) even though they held no priestly or royal office. The anointing here means divine protection and designation. Similarly, *nevi'ai* ('my prophets') is applied to Abraham (see Genesis 20:7, where God calls Abraham a prophet). The patriarchs carried both sacral and prophetic status before either institution formally existed.
16. The verb *vayyiqra ra'av* ('He called a famine') personifies famine as a servant who comes when summoned. God calls famine the way He calls prophets. The phrase *kol matteh lechem shavar* ('He broke every staff of bread') uses the image of bread as a walking stick — the support structure of life. When God breaks it, people fall. This introduces the Joseph narrative: famine drives the family to Egypt.
17. The verb *nimkar* (Niphal of *makhar*, 'to sell') is passive — Joseph was sold, acted upon, made into property. The psalm holds both truths simultaneously: Joseph was a victim of his brothers' cruelty and an agent of God's providence. Neither truth cancels the other.
18. The phrase *innu vakevel raglo* ('they afflicted his foot with a fetter') describes Joseph's imprisonment. The parallel line — *barzel ba'ah nafsho* ('iron came into his soul') — is one of the most powerful lines in the psalm: the iron did not merely bind his body but penetrated his *nephesh*. The shackle is not just on the ankle but in the soul. The verse compresses years of unjust imprisonment into two lines of visceral poetry.
19. The *ad et bo devaro* ('until the time his word came') refers to the fulfillment of Joseph's prophetic dreams. The verb *tserafathu* ('it refined him, it tested him') uses *tsaraph*, the metallurgical term for smelting — heating metal to remove impurities. God's word was a furnace through which Joseph passed. The imprisonment was not pointless suffering but purification. The timing is precise: Joseph suffered until the appointed moment, and not one day longer.
20. Pharaoh (*melekh*, 'king') released Joseph (*vayyattirehu*, 'he loosed him'). The title *moshel ammim* ('ruler of peoples') emphasizes that the most powerful ruler in the ancient world obeyed the divine timetable. When God's word came to pass, even Pharaoh became an instrument of liberation.
21. Joseph's elevation: *samo adon leveito* ('he appointed him lord of his house') and *moshel be-khol qinyano* ('ruler over all his possessions'). The slave becomes the master. The word *qinyan* ('possessions, property') is the same word used in Psalm 104:24 for God's creatures — Pharaoh's entire estate is placed under Joseph's authority. The reversal from slave to ruler is the psalm's exhibit of divine providence.
22. Joseph's authority extends to imprisoning officials (*le'sor sarav be-nafsho*, 'to bind his princes by his desire') and instructing elders (*u-zeqenav yechakkem*, 'and his elders he makes wise'). The former slave now chains princes and teaches wisdom to those older than him. The reversal is complete — and it all serves the purpose of preserving the covenant family through famine.
23. The entry into Egypt is stated plainly: *Yisra'el came to Mitsrayim*, Jacob became a *gar* ('sojourner') in the *erets Cham* ('land of Ham'). Ham is the ancestor of Egypt in the Table of Nations (Genesis 10:6). The word *gar* ('resident alien, sojourner') echoes the patriarchal condition in verse 12 — still landless, still wandering, still dependent on God's promise.
24. The verb *vayyepher* ('He made fruitful') uses *parah* ('to be fruitful') — the Genesis 1:28 blessing ('be fruitful and multiply') is now being fulfilled in Egypt. God's people multiply until they are stronger (*vayyaatsimehu*) than their *tsarav* ('their adversaries, their oppressors'). The demographic growth that Pharaoh will find threatening (Exodus 1:9-10) is here credited to God's direct action.
25. A theologically challenging verse: *hafakh libbam lisno ammo* ('He turned their heart to hate His people'). God hardened the Egyptians' hearts — the same theme as God hardening Pharaoh in Exodus. The verb *hafakh* ('to turn, to overturn') means God redirected Egyptian sentiment. The purpose clause *lehitnakel ba'avadav* ('to deal craftily with His servants') refers to Pharaoh's schemes in Exodus 1: forced labor, infanticide. The psalm does not flinch from divine sovereignty over even hostile human actions.

- 26.** Moses is avdo ('His servant') and Aaron is asher bachar bo ('whom He chose'). Both are instruments of divine sending (shalach) — Moses did not volunteer; he was sent. The psalm compresses the call narratives of Exodus 3-4 into a single line.
- 27.** Moses and Aaron executed divrei ototav ('the matters of His signs') and mofetim ('wonders, portents'). The plagues are about to be recounted — the psalm will list seven of the ten plagues in a rearranged order. The phrase be-erets Cham ('in the land of Ham') again identifies Egypt by its ancestral name.
- 28.** The plague sequence begins with darkness (the ninth plague in Exodus, here listed first). The verb shalach choshekh ('He sent darkness') echoes verse 26: God sends Moses, God sends darkness — both are agents dispatched on mission. The phrase ve-lo maru et devarav ('and they did not rebel against His word') is ambiguous — the subject could be Moses and Aaron (they obeyed) or the elements themselves (darkness obeyed its instructions). The rearranged plague order serves the psalm's literary structure rather than Exodus's historical sequence.
- 29.** The first plague of Exodus (water to blood) appears as the second plague in the psalm's sequence. The verb hafakh ('He turned, He overturned') is the same verb used in verse 25 for turning hearts — God is a God of reversals. The fish dying (vayyamet et degatam) is a detail preserved from Exodus 7:21.
- 30.** The verb sharats ('to swarm, to teem') is the creation verb from Genesis 1:20 — God's creative power now produces plagues. The tsepharde'im ('frogs') penetrate be-chadrei malkheihem ('in the inner rooms of their kings') — the most private, most protected spaces are invaded. No rank provides immunity.
- 31.** God spoke (amar) — the plague comes by word, echoing creation by word in Genesis 1. The arov ('swarms, mixed swarm') and kinnim ('gnats, lice') represent the fourth and third plagues of Exodus. The phrase be-khol gevulam ('in all their territory') means no border provided protection.
- 32.** The substitution natan gishmehem barad ('He gave their rains as hail') means God replaced the life-giving rain with destruction. The esh lehavot ('fire of flames, flaming fire') accompanies the hail (Exodus 9:24). The seventh plague combines water and fire — elements that should not coexist — in a supernatural display of divine power.
- 33.** The hail's destruction targeted agriculture: vines (gapnam) and fig trees (te'enatam), the staples of Mediterranean cultivation, were struck. The verb yeshabber ('He shattered') means the trees were not merely damaged but broken — the destruction of years of growth in minutes.
- 34.** Again God speaks (amar) and the plague arrives. The arbeh ('locusts') and yeleq ('young locusts, crawling locusts') — two stages of the same insect — arrived ein mispar ('without number'). The eighth plague is described with the same phrase used for sea creatures in Psalm 104:25. God's creative abundance is now directed toward judgment.
- 35.** The locusts consumed kol esev ('every plant') and peri admatam ('the fruit of their soil'). After the hail destroyed the trees, the locusts consumed what remained on the ground. The agricultural economy of Egypt is systematically dismantled, plague by plague.
- 36.** The climactic tenth plague: vayyakh kol bekhorei be-artsam ('He struck every firstborn in their land'). The word bekhorei ('firstborn') represents the family's future, and reshith le-khol onam ('the beginning of all their vigor') echoes Genesis 49:3 where Reuben is called reshith oni ('the beginning of my strength'). The firstborn is the family's hope embodied. God strikes that hope across the entire nation.
- 37.** The exodus: vayyotsi'em be-khesef ve-zahav ('He brought them out with silver and gold') — the plundering of Egypt (Exodus 12:35-36) is framed as God's provision. The phrase ve-ein bishvatav koshel ('and there was none among His tribes who stumbled') means Israel left Egypt in full strength — no one was sick, weak, or unable to march. The entire nation departed in vigor.
- 38.** The reversal is complete: Egypt, which had enslaved Israel, is now glad (samach) to see them leave. The fear has shifted — pachddam ('their dread') now falls upon the Egyptians. The oppressor begs the oppressed to go. The verb naphal ('fell') applied to pachad means the dread collapsed upon them like a physical weight.
- 39.** The wilderness provision begins: God spread (paras) a cloud (anan) as a masakh ('a screen, a covering') — protection from the desert sun. At night, fire (esh) provided light and warmth. The pillar of cloud and fire from Exodus 13:21-22 is here described as God's personal provision of shelter — a tent of cloud by day, a lamp of fire by night.
- 40.** The verb sha'al ('they asked') refers to the people's request for food. God responded with selav ('quail') and lechem shamayim ('bread of heaven, heavenly bread') — the manna. In Psalm 78, the request for food is framed as sinful complaint; here in Psalm 105, the negative element is omitted entirely. The psalm focuses on what God gave, not on how Israel asked.
- 41.** The verb patach tsur ('He opened the rock') pictures God splitting stone to release water. The verb vayyazuvu ('they gushed, they flowed') indicates abundant, rushing water — not a trickle but a torrent. The phrase halekhu batsiyot nahar ('they went through the dry places as a river') means a river appeared where there was no water. The desert became irrigated by divine intervention. The reference is to Exodus 17:1-7 and Numbers 20:1-13.
- 42.** The explanation for everything: ki zakhar et devar qodsho ('for He remembered His holy word'). The verb zakhar returns from verse 8 — God remembers. The covenant with Abraham (et Avraham avdo) is the engine of the exodus, the wilderness provision, and the conquest. Everything flows from one remembered promise.
- 43.** The exodus is summarized as a joyful procession: be-sason ('with joy') and be-rinnah ('with shouts of gladness, with singing'). The people are ammo ('His people') and bechirav ('His chosen ones'). The psalm's version of the exodus has no complaining, no golden calf, no rebellion — only joy and divine faithfulness.

44. The fulfillment: *vayyitten lahem artsot goyim* ('He gave them the lands of the nations'). The promise of verse 11 ('to you I will give the land of Canaan') is now realized. The phrase *amal le'ummim yirashu* ('the labor of peoples they inherited') means Israel received cities, vineyards, and fields they did not build or plant (see Deuteronomy 6:10-11). The inheritance is unearned — it is grace, not achievement.
45. The final verse reveals the psalm's purpose: history is told not merely to inform but to motivate obedience. If God was this faithful in keeping His covenant, Israel must respond by keeping God's statutes. The gift demands a response. Grace precedes law, as always in the Hebrew Bible — God acts first, then calls for obedience.

106

Summary: *The dark mirror of Psalm 105. Where 105 celebrated God's faithfulness with Israel's failures omitted, Psalm 106 catalogs those failures in unsparing detail: rebellion at the Red Sea, craving in the wilderness, jealousy of Moses, the golden calf, refusal to enter the land, joining Baal of Peor, grumbling at Meribah, failure to destroy the Canaanite nations, child sacrifice to idols. The psalm is a national confession that spans the entire history from Egypt to exile. Yet it opens and closes with praise, and its theological center is verse 44-45: despite everything, God heard their cry and remembered His covenant.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 106 is the most comprehensive confession of national sin in the Psalter. It functions as a communal penitential liturgy, likely used in exile or the early post-exilic period. The psalm's genius is its honesty: it does not excuse, minimize, or explain away Israel's failures. They forgot God's works (v. 13), they were jealous of Moses (v. 16), they exchanged their glory for an image of a bull (v. 20), they sacrificed their children to demons (v. 37). The language is brutal. Yet the psalm is framed by praise — it opens with *halelu Yah* and *hodu la-YHVH ki tov* ('praise the LORD, give thanks to the LORD for He is good') and closes with a doxology and *halelu Yah*. The confession exists within worship. Israel's worst moments are told in God's presence, and the telling itself is an act of faith: only a people who believe in God's *chesed* can afford to be this honest about their failures.*

Translation Friction: *The psalm's assertion that God 'gave them into the hand of the nations' (v. 41) and 'many times He delivered them, but they were rebellious' (v. 43) frames the exile as the consequence of centuries of accumulated disobedience. This raises the question of whether the generation that experienced exile was being punished for the sins of their ancestors. The psalm's answer seems to be that the pattern of sin was continuous — each generation participated in it. The closing prayer in verse 47 ('Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the nations') locates the psalm in the exile or diaspora, making it a prayer for restoration based not on Israel's merit but on God's character.*

Connections: *The psalm parallels Nehemiah 9:5-37, another great historical confession. The golden calf episode (vv. 19-23) draws on Exodus 32 and Deuteronomy 9. The Baal Peor incident (vv. 28-31) draws on Numbers 25. The child sacrifice reference (vv. 37-38) draws on 2 Kings 16:3 and Jeremiah 7:31. The closing doxology (v. 48) marks the end of Book IV of the Psalter. Verse 1 appears in 1 Chronicles 16:34-36 as part of David's song. The phrase 'He remembered His covenant' (v. 45) echoes Psalm 105:8 and Exodus 2:24.*

1Praise the LORD!

Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good,
for His faithful love endures forever.

2Who can recount the mighty acts of the LORD
or declare all His praise?

3Blessed are those who maintain justice,
who practice righteousness at all times.

4Remember me, O LORD, with the favor you show your people;
visit me with your salvation,

⁵that I may see the prosperity of your chosen ones,
that I may rejoice in the gladness of your nation,
that I may boast with your inheritance.

⁶We have sinned along with our ancestors;
we have done wrong; we have acted wickedly.

⁷Our ancestors in Egypt did not grasp your wonders;
they did not remember the abundance of your faithful love,
but rebelled at the sea, at the Sea of Reeds.

⁸Yet He saved them for His name's sake,
to make His mighty power known.

⁹He rebuked the Sea of Reeds and it dried up;
He led them through the depths as through a desert.

¹⁰He saved them from the hand of the foe
and redeemed them from the hand of the enemy.

¹¹The waters covered their adversaries;
not one of them survived.

¹²Then they believed His words;
they sang His praise.

¹³They quickly forgot His works;
they did not wait for His counsel.

¹⁴They craved intensely in the wilderness
and tested God in the wasteland.

¹⁵He gave them what they asked for,
but sent a wasting disease into their souls.

¹⁶They were jealous of Moses in the camp,
of Aaron, the holy one of the LORD.

¹⁷The earth opened and swallowed Dathan
and covered the assembly of Abiram.

¹⁸Fire blazed among their assembly;
a flame consumed the wicked.

¹⁹They made a calf at Horeb
and worshipped a cast image.

²⁰They exchanged their glory
for the image of a bull that eats grass.

²¹They forgot God their savior,
who had done great things in Egypt,

²²wonders in the land of Ham,
terrible deeds at the Sea of Reeds.

²³So He said He would destroy them —
had not Moses, His chosen one,
stood in the breach before Him
to turn His wrath from destroying them.

²⁴They rejected the desirable land;
they did not believe His word.

²⁵They grumbled in their tents;
they did not listen to the voice of the LORD.

²⁶So He raised His hand against them,
swearing to make them fall in the wilderness,

²⁷to cast down their offspring among the nations
and to scatter them across the lands.

²⁸They yoked themselves to Baal of Peor
and ate sacrifices offered to the dead.

²⁹They provoked Him with their deeds,
and a plague broke out among them.

³⁰Then Phinehas stood up and intervened,
and the plague was stopped.

³¹It was credited to him as righteousness
for all generations forever.

³²They angered God at the waters of Meribah,
and it went badly for Moses on their account.

³³For they embittered his spirit,
and he spoke rashly with his lips.

³⁴They did not destroy the peoples
as the LORD had commanded them.

³⁵They mingled with the nations
and learned their practices.

³⁶They served their idols,
which became a snare to them.

³⁷They sacrificed their sons
and their daughters to demons.

³⁸They poured out innocent blood —
the blood of their sons and daughters,

whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan —
and the land was polluted with blood.

³⁹They defiled themselves by their deeds
and prostituted themselves by their practices.

⁴⁰Then the anger of the LORD burned against His people,
and He abhorred His own inheritance.

⁴¹He gave them into the hand of the nations,
and those who hated them ruled over them.

⁴²Their enemies oppressed them,
and they were subdued under their hand.

⁴³Many times He rescued them,
but they were rebellious in their purposes
and sank low through their iniquity.

⁴⁴But He looked on their distress
when He heard their cry.

⁴⁵He remembered His covenant for their sake
and relented according to the abundance of His faithful love.

⁴⁶He caused all their captors
to show them compassion.

⁴⁷Save us, O LORD our God,
and gather us from among the nations,
that we may give thanks to your holy name
and boast in your praise.

⁴⁸Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,
from everlasting to everlasting!
And let all the people say, 'Amen!'
Praise the LORD!

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The psalm opens with the liturgical formula *halelu Yah* and the confession *hodu la-YHVH ki tov ki le-olam chasdo* ('give thanks to the LORD for He is good, for His faithful love is forever'). This exact phrase appears in Psalms 107:1, 118:1, 136:1, and 1 Chronicles 16:34. The confession of God's goodness and eternal *chesed* precedes the confession of Israel's sin — grace comes first, even in penitential liturgy.
2. The rhetorical question *mi yemallel gevurot YHVH* ('who can speak the mighty acts of the LORD?') acknowledges that God's acts exceed human capacity to narrate them. The verb *mallel* ('to speak, to recount') means that even the longest psalm cannot exhaust the subject.
3. The beatitude *ashrei shomerei mishpat* ('blessed are the keepers of justice') sets the standard that the rest of the psalm will show Israel failing to meet. The phrase *oseh tzedakah be-khol et* ('doing righteousness at all times') is the ideal — continuous, unfailing obedience. The psalm will now demonstrate that Israel achieved this at almost no point in their history.
4. The psalmist makes a personal request within the communal psalm: *zokhreini YHVH* ('remember me, LORD'). The verb *paqdeini* ('visit me') uses *paqad*, which means to attend to, to take note of, to act on behalf of. The psalmist asks to be included in the favor (*ratson*) God shows His people and in the salvation (*yeshu'ah*) God provides.

5. Three purpose clauses: *lir'ot* ('to see'), *lismo'ach* ('to rejoice'), *lehithallel* ('to boast'). The psalmist wants to witness God's goodness to Israel, participate in the nation's joy, and share in the glory of being God's *nachalah* ('inheritance, possession'). This personal prayer frames the communal confession that follows.
6. The three sin-verbs (*chata*, *avah*, *rasha*) correspond to the three sin-nouns in Psalm 103:10-12 (*chet*, *avon*, *pesha*). What Psalm 103 celebrated God forgiving, Psalm 106 confesses Israel committing. The two psalms are in theological conversation.
7. The first failure: *lo hiskilu nifle'otekha* ('they did not understand your wonders') — Israel saw the plagues but did not comprehend their meaning. The phrase *lo zakheru et rov chasadekha* ('they did not remember the multitude of your faithful loves') uses the plural of *chesed* — God's faithful love was manifold, and Israel forgot all of it. The rebellion at the *yam suf* ('Sea of Reeds') refers to Exodus 14:11-12, where Israel complained that Moses had brought them to die in the wilderness.
8. The pattern that will repeat throughout the psalm: Israel sins, yet God saves. The motivation is *le-ma'an shemo* ('for His name's sake') — not for Israel's merit but for God's own reputation. The phrase *lehodi'a et gevurato* ('to make known His might') means the salvation was a display of divine power intended for witness beyond Israel.
9. God rebuked (*vayyig'ar*) the sea as He rebuked the waters in Psalm 104:7 — the same authority over chaos. The *tehomot* ('depths, abysses') through which Israel walked became like a *midbar* ('desert, wilderness') — dry ground in the middle of the ocean. The imagery collapses the distinction between land and sea: where God commands, any terrain becomes walkable.
10. The verb *vayyoshi'em* ('He saved them') and *vayyig'alem* ('He redeemed them') pair salvation with redemption. The *go'el* concept from Psalm 103:4 returns — God acts as kinsman-redeemer, buying Israel back from the enemy's grasp.
11. The sea that parted for Israel closed over their enemies: *echad mehem lo notar* ('not one of them remained'). The totality is emphatic — the destruction was complete. The same waters that served as walls for Israel became a grave for Egypt.
12. Brief, conditional faith: *vayyaaminu vidvarav* ('they believed His words') — but only after seeing the miracle. The singing (*yashiru tehillato*) refers to the Song of the Sea (Exodus 15). The psalm will immediately show how short-lived this faith was.
13. The verb *miharu* ('they hurried') modifies the forgetting — they forgot quickly (*shahekhu ma'asav*). The phrase *lo chikku la'atsato* ('they did not wait for His counsel') means impatience drove their rebellion. They wanted answers and provision on their schedule, not God's. Speed of forgetting is the measure of shallow faith.
14. The phrase *vayyit'avvu ta'avah* ('they desired a desire, they craved a craving') is an intensified form — the cognate accusative emphasizes the force of the desire. The reference is to Numbers 11:4-6, the craving for meat. The verb *vayyenassu* ('they tested') means they put God on trial, demanding proof of His ability and willingness to provide.
15. The word *razon* is debated — it could mean physical illness (Numbers 11:33, where a plague struck those who ate the quail) or spiritual emptiness. Both readings are theologically productive. The principle is the same: desire fulfilled outside God's timing and will produces not satisfaction but wasting.
16. The verb *vayyeqan'u* ('they were jealous') introduces the Korah rebellion (Numbers 16). The jealousy targeted Moses' authority and Aaron's priestly status as *qedosh YHVH* ('the holy one of the LORD'). The title *qedosh* designates Aaron as set apart by God — the jealousy is ultimately against God's appointments, not merely human leaders.
17. The earth itself executed judgment: *tiftach erets vattiblah* ('the earth opened and swallowed Dathan'). The reference is Numbers 16:31-33. The verb *bala* ('to swallow') pictures the ground consuming the rebels like a mouth. The *addat Aviram* ('assembly of Abiram') was covered (*vattekhas*) — buried alive. The creation that Psalm 104 celebrated now serves as instrument of judgment.
18. The fire (*esh*) that burned among the rebels (Numbers 16:35) is here presented as divinely directed: *lehavah tellahet resha'im* ('a flame devoured the wicked'). The 250 men who offered unauthorized incense were consumed by fire from the LORD.
19. The golden calf: *ya'asu egel be-Chorev* ('they made a calf at Horeb'). The mountain of revelation became the mountain of idolatry. The *massekah* ('cast image, molten idol') is the work of human hands substituted for the invisible God. The verb *vayyishtachavu* ('they bowed down') — the posture of worship directed toward a metal animal.
20. The word *tavnit* ('form, pattern, image') means they did not merely make an idol but created a representation — they reduced the unrepresentable God to a visible form. The specification *okhel esev* ('eating grass') is the psalm's contemptuous detail: the 'god' they made was herbivorous.
21. The verb *shakhekhu* ('they forgot') echoes verse 13 — forgetting is Israel's habitual sin. The God they forgot is *El moshi'am* ('God their savior, the God who delivers them'). The irony is extreme: they forgot the One who had just done *gedolot* ('great things') in Egypt. The proximity between salvation and forgetting measures the shallowness of Israel's memory.
22. The *nifla'ot* ('wonders') in Egypt and *nora'ot* ('terrible things, awesome acts') at the Sea of Reeds are the very events the psalm described in verses 7-11. The repetition emphasizes the magnitude of what Israel forgot.
23. The image of standing in the breach (*perets*) became a standard metaphor for intercessory prayer. Ezekiel 22:30 uses the same image: God sought someone to stand in the gap, and found no one. Moses is the paradigmatic intercessor — the one person whose prayer could halt divine judgment.

24. The verb *vayyim'asu* ('they rejected, they despised') is applied to *erets chemdah* ('the desirable land, the land of delight'). The reference is Numbers 13-14: the spies returned with a report of giants, and the people refused to enter. The phrase *lo he'eminu lidvaro* ('they did not believe His word') identifies the root cause: unbelief. God had promised the land; they did not believe the promise. The rejection of the land is ultimately a rejection of God's word.
25. The verb *vayyeragenu* ('they grumbled, they murmured') uses *ragan*, a word for discontented whispering — the kind of complaint that spreads through a camp tent by tent. The phrase *be-oholeihem* ('in their tents') locates the grumbling in private spaces — it was not public protest but corrosive private complaint. They would not listen (*lo shame'u*) to God's voice.
26. The phrase *vayyissa yado* ('He raised His hand') is an oath gesture — God swore with an uplifted hand. The content of the oath: *lehappil otam bamidbar* ('to make them fall in the wilderness'). This is the judgment of Numbers 14:29-35: the exodus generation would die in the wilderness and never enter the land.
27. The judgment extends beyond the wilderness generation: *u-lehappil zar'am baggoyim* ('to make their seed fall among the nations'). The verb *lezarotam* ('to scatter them') points to the exile — the diaspora is foreshadowed here as a consequence of the same pattern of unbelief that characterized the wilderness generation. The psalm reads exile as the long-delayed consequence of Kadesh Barnea.
28. The verb *vayyitsamdu* ('they yoked themselves, they attached themselves') uses *tsamad*, a word for binding or yoking — Israel bound itself to a foreign deity the way an ox is yoked to a plow. *Ba'al Pe'or* was a Moabite deity associated with the incident of Numbers 25. The phrase *zivchei metim* ('sacrifices of the dead') means either sacrifices offered to dead gods (idols) or sacrifices associated with death cults. Either way, Israel ate what was offered to that which is not God.
29. The verb *vayyakh'isu* ('they provoked, they angered') uses *ka'as*, the word for deep vexation. The *ma'alaleihem* ('their deeds, their practices') refers to the sexual and cultic participation with Moab. The *maggefah* ('plague, striking') that broke out killed 24,000 (Numbers 25:9).
30. Phinehas (Pinchas) is the second intercessor after Moses. The verb *vayefalleh* ('he intervened, he judged, he interceded') can mean judicial execution or intercessory prayer — in Numbers 25:7-8, Phinehas drove a spear through the Israelite man and the Midianite woman. The plague stopped (*vatte'atsar*) because of his decisive action. Like Moses in verse 23, one person's intervention saved the nation.
31. The phrase *vattechasev lo litsedaqah* ('it was counted to him as righteousness') uses the same language as Genesis 15:6 (Abraham 'believed the LORD, and He credited it to him as righteousness'). Phinehas' act of zeal was evaluated by God as *tsedaqah* — righteous action. The scope is *le-dor va-dor ad olam* ('to generation and generation forever'). Numbers 25:12-13 confirms this: God gave Phinehas a covenant of perpetual priesthood.
32. The *mei Merivah* ('waters of Meribah/Strife') refers to Numbers 20:1-13. The people's quarreling (*riv*) at Meribah provoked God, but the consequence fell on Moses: *vayyera le-Mosheh ba'avuram* ('it went badly for Moses because of them'). Moses struck the rock instead of speaking to it and was barred from entering the land. The people's sin caused Moses' punishment — collective sin has individual casualties.
33. The verb *himru* ('they embittered, they rebelled against') has God's spirit as its object in some readings, or Moses' spirit in others. The result: *vayvatte bishfatav* ('he spoke rashly with his lips'). Moses, the paradigmatic intercessor, was provoked into rash speech. The phrase acknowledges that even the greatest leader can be broken by sustained rebellion. Numbers 20:10 ('Listen, you rebels!') is the rash speech in view.
34. The scene shifts to the conquest and settlement period. Israel failed to carry out the *herem* ('devoted destruction') commanded in Deuteronomy 7:1-2. The verb *lo hishmidu* ('they did not destroy') is a direct indictment of disobedience.
35. The verb *vayyit'arevu* ('they mingled, they mixed') indicates social and cultural integration. The result: *vayyilmedu ma'aseihem* ('they learned their practices'). The knowledge was not neutral — it was adoption. Israel absorbed the religious practices of the surrounding nations. What Deuteronomy warned against (7:3-4) happened precisely as predicted.
36. The *atsabbeihem* ('their idols') is from the root *atsav* ('to shape, to form, to grieve') — idols are both shaped things and sources of grief. The metaphor *moqesh* ('a snare, a trap') means the idols that seemed harmless became instruments of entrapment. Israel could not free itself once caught.
37. The darkest verse in the psalm: *vayyizbechu et beneihem ve-et benoteihem* ('they sacrificed their sons and their daughters'). The recipients are *lashedim* ('to demons') — the word *shed* appears only here and in Deuteronomy 32:17 in the Hebrew Bible. Child sacrifice is attested in 2 Kings 16:3, 17:17, and 21:6. The psalm presents it as the logical terminus of idolatry: begin by serving idols, end by killing your children for them.
38. The phrase *dam naqi* ('innocent blood') is the legal term for the blood of those who have committed no crime. The children are innocent; their blood pollutes the land. The verb *vattechenaf* ('it was polluted, it was defiled') uses *chanef*, meaning the land itself became profane, contaminated. In Leviticus 18:25, the land vomits out inhabitants who defile it. The psalm traces the path from idolatry to child sacrifice to land pollution to exile — a chain of escalating defilement.
39. The verb *vayyitme'u* ('they defiled themselves') uses *tame* ('unclean, impure') — ritual and moral defilement. The verb *vayyiznu* ('they prostituted themselves') uses *zanah* ('to commit sexual immorality, to be unfaithful'). In prophetic literature, idolatry is consistently described as sexual infidelity — Israel is God's wife, and worship of other gods is adultery. The psalm uses the same metaphor.
40. The phrase *vayyichar af YHVH* ('the anger of the LORD burned') is the standard expression for divine wrath. The word *vayyeta'ev* ('He abhorred, He found detestable') is extreme — God found His own *nachalatoh* ('His inheritance, His possession') repulsive. The people God chose, the people God redeemed, the people God loved became detestable to Him through their sin. This is the low point of the psalm.

41. The verb *vayyittenem* ('He gave them') means God actively handed Israel over to foreign power. This is the theology of the book of Judges compressed: Israel's subjection to foreign nations is not random political misfortune but divine judgment. The phrase *vayyimshelu vahem son'eihem* ('their enemies ruled over them') describes the exile as God's deliberate act.
42. The verb *vayyilchatsum* ('they oppressed them, they pressed them') uses *lachats*, the same word used for Egypt's oppression of Israel in Exodus 3:9. The cycle is tragic: the people God freed from oppression now experience oppression again — this time as divine judgment, not Pharaoh's cruelty.
43. The phrase *pe'amim rabbot yatsilem* ('many times He delivered them') summarizes the entire Judges cycle: sin, oppression, crying out, deliverance — repeated endlessly. The conjunction *ve-hemmah yamru va'atsatam* ('but they rebelled in their plans') shows the pattern was unbreakable from the human side. The verb *vayyamokku* ('they sank low, they were brought low') uses *makakh*, a word for decay and decline. Each cycle of rebellion brought Israel lower.
44. The great 'but': *vayyar batsar lahem* ('He saw their distress'). Despite everything — the golden calf, the grumbling, the idolatry, the child sacrifice — when Israel cried out, God saw and heard. The verb *shom'o et rinnatam* ('when He heard their cry') echoes Exodus 2:24 — the same God who heard the cry in Egypt hears the cry in exile. God's responsiveness outlasts Israel's rebellion.
45. The verb *nacham* applied to God is theologically significant: it does not mean God made a mistake and corrected it, but that God's response to Israel shifted from judgment to mercy. The trigger was not Israel's repentance but God's own covenant-faithfulness. *chesed* precedes and produces repentance; it does not wait for it.
46. God arranged compassion (*rachamim*) for Israel even in captivity: *vayyitten otam le-rachamim lifnei kol shoveihem* ('He gave them to compassion before all who captured them'). The word *shoveihem* ('their captors') indicates exile is in view. Even foreign captors were moved to pity — not by Israel's appeal but by God's intervention.
47. The psalm turns to direct petition: *hoshi'enu YHVH Eloheinu* ('save us, LORD our God'). The verb *qabbe-tsenu min haggoyim* ('gather us from among the nations') is the prayer of the diaspora — God's people are scattered and need to be regathered. The purpose of the gathering is worship: *lehodot le-shem qodshekha* ('to give thanks to your holy name'). Israel wants to be saved not merely for comfort but for praise. This verse appears in 1 Chronicles 16:35.
48. This verse serves a dual function: it closes Psalm 106 and marks the end of Book IV (Psalms 90-106). The doxology formula appears in 1 Chronicles 16:36. The transition from confession to doxology enacts the psalm's theology: sin is real, but God's blessedness is the final word.

107

Summary: *The opening psalm of Book V, Psalm 107 is a hymn of thanksgiving built around four scenes of distress and deliverance: wanderers lost in the desert (vv. 4-9), prisoners in darkness (vv. 10-16), the sick near death (vv. 17-22), and sailors in a storm (vv. 23-32). Each scene follows the same four-part pattern: distress, crying out to God, deliverance, and a call to give thanks. A wisdom epilogue (vv. 33-43) reflects on God's sovereign reversal of human fortunes. The refrain 'Let them give thanks to the LORD for His faithful love' appears four times, once for each scene.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 107 is one of the most structurally elegant poems in the Psalter. The fourfold repetition of distress-cry-rescue-thanksgiving creates a liturgical rhythm that is almost musical. Each section has two refrains: 'They cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and He delivered them from their distress' and 'Let them give thanks to the LORD for His faithful love and His wonders for the children of humanity.' The repetition is not monotonous but cumulative — each scene adds to the evidence that God's *chesed* operates everywhere: in deserts, in prisons, in sickbeds, on the open sea. The psalm argues inductively: here is one case, here is another, here is another, here is another — therefore God's faithful love endures forever. The wisdom epilogue then generalizes: God turns rivers into deserts and deserts into springs, brings down the proud and lifts up the needy. The psalm's audience is universal — these are not uniquely Israelite experiences but human ones.*

Translation Friction: *The placement as the opening psalm of Book V is significant. Book IV ended with a prayer for gathering from the nations (106:47); Book V opens with a description of the gathered ones giving thanks (107:1-3). Whether this represents actual post-exilic composition or careful editorial arrangement is debated. The four scenes may represent literal experiences (travelers, prisoners, sick people, sailors) or may function metaphorically for Israel's exile and return. The sick who are afflicted 'because of their transgression' (v. 17) explicitly links suffering to sin, while the other three scenes do not — a tension the psalm leaves unresolved.*

Connections: The opening formula hodu la-YHVH ki tov ki le-olam chasdo ('give thanks to the LORD for He is good, for His faithful love endures forever') connects to Psalms 106:1, 118:1, and 136:1. The gathering from east, west, north, and south (v. 3) echoes Isaiah 43:5-6. The storm scene (vv. 23-30) has parallels to Jonah 1. The wisdom epilogue (vv. 33-43) echoes Hannah's Song (1 Samuel 2:1-10) and the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) in its theme of divine reversal. Jesus' stilling of the storm (Mark 4:35-41) echoes verse 29: 'He stilled the storm to a whisper.'

- ¹Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good,
for His faithful love endures forever.
- ²Let the redeemed of the LORD say so,
those He redeemed from the hand of the foe,
- ³and gathered from the lands,
from east and from west,
from north and from the sea.
- ⁴They wandered in the wilderness, on a desert road;
they found no city to settle in.
- ⁵Hungry and thirsty,
their life was ebbing away.
- ⁶Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble,
and He delivered them from their distress.
- ⁷He led them by a straight road
to reach a city where they could settle.
- ⁸Let them give thanks to the LORD for His faithful love
and His wonders for the children of humanity.
- ⁹For He satisfies the longing soul
and fills the hungry soul with good things.
- ¹⁰Those who sat in darkness and deep shadow,
prisoners in affliction and chains,
- ¹¹because they rebelled against the words of God
and despised the counsel of the Most High.
- ¹²He humbled their hearts through hard labor;
they stumbled, with no one to help.
- ¹³Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble,
and He saved them from their distress.
- ¹⁴He brought them out of darkness and deep shadow
and tore apart their chains.
- ¹⁵Let them give thanks to the LORD for His faithful love
and His wonders for the children of humanity.

¹⁶For He shattered gates of bronze
and cut through bars of iron.

¹⁷Fools — because of their rebellious ways
and because of their iniquities — suffered affliction.

¹⁸They loathed all food
and drew near to the gates of death.

¹⁹Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble,
and He saved them from their distress.

²⁰He sent His word and healed them
and rescued them from the pit.

²¹Let them give thanks to the LORD for His faithful love
and His wonders for the children of humanity.

²²Let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving
and recount His deeds with shouts of joy.

²³Those who went down to the sea in ships,
doing business on the great waters,

²⁴They saw the works of the LORD,
His wonders in the deep.

²⁵He spoke and raised a stormy wind
that lifted the waves high.

²⁶They rose to the heavens, they plunged to the depths;
their courage melted in their peril.

²⁷They staggered and swayed like drunkards,
and all their skill was swallowed up.

²⁸Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble,
and He brought them out of their distress.

²⁹He stilled the storm to a whisper,
and the waves were hushed.

³⁰They were glad when the waters grew calm,
and He guided them to their desired harbor.

³¹Let them give thanks to the LORD for His faithful love
and His wonders for the children of humanity.

³²Let them exalt Him in the assembly of the people
and praise Him in the council of the elders.

³³He turns rivers into desert
and springs of water into thirsty ground,

^{34a}a fruitful land into a salt waste,
because of the wickedness of its inhabitants.

³⁵He turns desert into pools of water
and parched land into springs.

³⁶He settles the hungry there,
and they establish a city to dwell in.

³⁷They sow fields and plant vineyards
that yield a fruitful harvest.

³⁸He blesses them and they multiply greatly,
and He does not let their livestock diminish.

³⁹When they are diminished and brought low
through oppression, trouble, and sorrow,

⁴⁰He pours contempt on nobles
and makes them wander in trackless waste.

⁴¹But He lifts the needy out of affliction
and makes their families like flocks.

⁴²The upright see it and rejoice,
and all wickedness shuts its mouth.

⁴³Whoever is wise, let him observe these things
and consider the faithful love of the LORD.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The identical opening to Psalm 106:1. The phrase *ki le-olam chasdo* ('for His faithful love is forever') is the thesis the psalm will prove four times over. Each of the four scenes will demonstrate that *chesed* is not a theological abstraction but an operational reality in specific human crises.
2. The *ge'ulei YHVH* ('the redeemed of the LORD') are those who have experienced God's *go'el* action — His kinsman-redeemer rescue. The verb *ge'alam* ('He redeemed them') and the noun *ge'ulei* share the same root. The redeemed are the ones qualified to give thanks: they have firsthand testimony.
3. The ingathering from four directions: *mi-mizrach* ('from the east'), *u-mi-ma'arav* ('from the west'), *mi-tsafon* ('from the north'), *u-mi-yam* ('from the sea'). The last term is literally 'from the sea' (*yam*), which in Hebrew directional language means 'south' (the direction of the Red Sea from Israel). The four compass points indicate universal regathering — wherever God's people were scattered, He brought them back.
4. Scene one begins: lost travelers. The verb *ta'u* ('they wandered, they strayed') indicates purposeless, directionless movement. The *bamidbar bishimon derekh* ('in the wilderness, on a wasteland path') places them in terrain without landmarks. The phrase *ir moshav lo matsa'u* ('a city of habitation they did not find') means they had no destination, no shelter, no community. They were utterly lost.
5. The *re'evim gam tseme'im* ('hungry and also thirsty') describes total deprivation. The phrase *nafsham bahem tit'attaf* ('their soul within them was fainting') uses the verb *ataf* ('to be feeble, to faint, to be covered over'). The *nephesh* — the life-force — was failing. They were dying.
6. The first occurrence of the cry-and-rescue refrain: *vayyits'aqu el YHVH batsar lahem* ('they cried to the LORD in their distress'). The verb *tsa'aq* ('to cry out') is the exodus verb — the same cry Israel raised in Egypt (Exodus 2:23). The response: *mi-metsuqoteihem yatsilem* ('from their straits He rescued them'). The *metsuqah* ('strait, distress, tight place') is a narrow passage from which only God can extract them.
7. God's response to the lost: *vayyaddrikhem be-derekh yesharah* ('He led them by a straight path'). The verb *darak* in the Hiphil means to guide someone's feet onto a path. The *derekh yesharah* ('straight road') contrasts with the aimless wandering of verse 4. The destination: *ir moshav* ('a city of habitation') — the very thing they could not find, God provided.

8. The first occurrence of the thanksgiving refrain: yodu la-YHWH chasdo ve-nifle'otav livnei adam. The beneficiaries are not 'the children of Israel' but livnei adam ('the children of humanity, human beings'). The psalm's scope is universal — God's chesed operates for all people, not only the covenant nation.
9. God satisfies (hisbia) the nephesh shoqeqah ('the parched soul, the longing soul') and fills (mille) the nephesh re'evah ('the hungry soul') with tov ('good, goodness'). The scene closes with the hunger and thirst of verse 5 fully resolved. The satisfied soul is the evidence of chesed.
10. Scene two: prisoners. The yoshevei choshekh ve-tsalmavet ('those sitting in darkness and death-shadow') describes people confined in dungeons where no light reaches. The word tsalmavet is a compound of tsel ('shadow') and mavet ('death') — the shadow cast by death itself. They are asirei oni u-varzel ('prisoners of affliction and iron'). The iron is literal; the affliction is both physical and spiritual.
11. The cause of imprisonment: ki himru imrei El ('they rebelled against the words of God'). The verb marah ('to rebel, to be bitter') indicates defiance. The atsut Elyon ('counsel of the Most High') was scorned (na'atsu, from na'ats, 'to despise, to scorn'). This is the one scene where sin is explicitly named as the cause of distress.
12. The verb vayyakhna ('He humbled') uses kana ('to bow down, to subdue') — God brought their hearts low through suffering. The amal ('labor, toil, hardship') broke them. The phrase kashelu ve-ein ozer ('they stumbled and there was no helper') describes the moment of total helplessness that precedes the cry for help.
13. The second occurrence of the cry-refrain. The verb changes slightly from yatsilem ('He delivered,' v. 6) to yoshi'em ('He saved') — the language intensifies with each scene.
14. God's action reverses the imprisonment of verse 10: yotsi'em me-choshekh ve-tsalmavet ('He brought them out of darkness and death-shadow') and u-moseroteihem yenattiq ('their bonds He tore apart'). The verb nataq ('to tear, to pull apart, to break') means the chains were not unlocked but ripped — divine force overcomes iron.
15. The thanksgiving refrain, second occurrence. Identical wording to verse 8. The repetition builds the psalm's case: chesed is not episodic but patterned.
16. The specifics of the rescue: shibbar daltot nechoshet ('He shattered doors of bronze') and u-verichei varzel gidde'a ('bars of iron He cut through'). The verbs shibbar ('to shatter') and gidde'a ('to cut, to hew') describe violent destruction of the strongest materials available for imprisonment. No dungeon can hold those God decides to free.
17. Scene three: the sick. The evilim ('fools') are not intellectually deficient but morally perverse — in wisdom literature, the fool rejects God's instruction. The cause is explicit: mi-derekh pish'am ('because of their rebellious way') and me-avonoteihem ('because of their iniquities'). The suffering (yit'annu, 'they were afflicted') is presented as a consequence of moral folly.
18. The physical symptom: kol okhel teta'ev nafsham ('every food their soul abhorred') — total loss of appetite, the body refusing sustenance. The phrase vayyaggi'u ad sha'arei mavet ('they reached the gates of death') means they arrived at death's threshold. The sha'arei mavet ('gates of death') is a spatial metaphor — death is a walled city, and the sick person stands at its entrance.
19. Third occurrence of the cry-refrain. The same words, the same pattern — the repetition is the point. The pattern does not change because God does not change.
20. God heals by sending His word: yishlach devaro ve-yirpa'em ('He sent His word and healed them'). The word (davar) is the agent of healing — God does not need to be physically present; His word carries His power. The verb vimallate ('He rescued') uses malat ('to escape, to deliver') from shechitotam ('their destructions, their pits'). The word is both physician and rescuer.
21. Third occurrence of the thanksgiving refrain. The evidence accumulates: lost travelers, prisoners, the dying — all rescued by the same chesed.
22. The healed are called to bring zivchei todah ('sacrifices of thanksgiving') — the todah offering of Leviticus 7:12-15, which accompanies a testimony of deliverance. The verb yesapperu ('let them recount') means the sacrifice is paired with public testimony. Worship is both ritual and narrative: you bring an offering and tell the story.
23. Scene four: sailors. The yordei hayyam ba-oniyyot ('those who go down to the sea in ships') are merchants and traders. The phrase oseï melakhah be-mayim rabbim ('doing work on great waters') describes commercial seafaring. The sea in Hebrew thought is the domain of chaos — to travel on it is to enter the realm of the tehom.
24. Sailors witness God's power firsthand: hemmah ra'u ma'asei YHWH ('they saw the works of the LORD'). The bimtsulah ('in the deep, in the abyss') locates the wonders in the most dangerous environment — the deep sea where human power means nothing.
25. God commands the storm: vayyomer vayya'amed ruach se'arah ('He spoke and He made a storm wind stand'). The verb amad ('to stand') in the Hiphil means God stationed the wind like a soldier at a post. The waves (gallav) rose at God's command. The storm is not random weather but divine action.
26. The violent motion of the ship: ya'alu shamayim ('they go up to the heavens') and yerdu tehomot ('they go down to the depths'). The extremes — sky and abyss — describe the terrifying pitch of a ship in heavy seas. The phrase nafsham bera'ah titmogag ('their soul in calamity melts') uses mogag ('to melt, to dissolve') — their courage liquefied.

- 27.** The sailors yachogu ve-yanuu kashshikkor ('they stagger and sway like a drunkard') — seasoned seamen reduced to helplessness. The phrase ve-khol chokmatam titballa ('and all their wisdom is swallowed up') means their professional expertise is consumed by the chaos. The sea has devoured their competence. This is the moment of complete human inadequacy.
- 28.** Fourth and final occurrence of the cry-refrain. The verb shifts again: yotsi'em ('He brought them out') — the exodus verb. Every rescue in the psalm recapitulates the original exodus.
- 29.** The word demamah is one of the great theological words of the Hebrew Bible. It is the sound of God's presence when all competing noise ceases. The storm-to-stillness movement is not merely meteorological but spiritual: chaos yields to divine peace.
- 30.** Joy returns: vayyismechu ki yishttoqu ('they rejoiced because they were quiet'). The verb shaqat means the waters settled. God then guided them (vayyanchem) to mechoz cheftsam ('the harbor of their desire') — the destination they were trying to reach. The rescue is not merely survival but arrival. God does not just save from death; He brings to destination.
- 31.** Fourth and final occurrence of the thanksgiving refrain. The case is complete: four scenes, four cries, four rescues, four calls to thank. The evidence for chesed is overwhelming.
- 32.** The sailors' thanksgiving is to be public: bi-qehal am ('in the assembly of the people') and be-moshav zeqenim ('in the seat of the elders'). The testimony is not private but communal — it is given in the formal gathering where decisions are made and justice is administered. The elders hear the sailor's story and recognize God's hand.
- 33.** The wisdom epilogue begins. God reverses landscapes: neharot le-midbar ('rivers to wilderness') and motsa'ei mayim le-tsimma'on ('springs of water to drought'). The God who provided water from rocks (Psalm 105:41) can also remove water from rivers. Divine sovereignty operates in both directions.
- 34.** Fertile land becomes melechah ('salt flats, barren salt ground') — the landscape of Sodom after its destruction. The cause: me-ra'at yoshvei vah ('because of the wickedness of those dwelling in it'). The land's condition reflects its inhabitants' character. Ecological devastation is presented as moral consequence.
- 35.** The reversal in the other direction: midbar la-agam mayim ('desert to a pool of water') and erets tsiyyah le-motsa'ei mayim ('dry land to springs of water'). God transforms in both directions — from fertility to wasteland (vv. 33-34) and from wasteland to fertility (v. 35). The power is the same; the direction depends on God's purpose.
- 36.** God settles (vayyoshev) the hungry (re'evim) in the transformed land. They build an ir moshav ('a city of habitation') — the same phrase from verse 4 and verse 7. What the lost wanderers could not find, God creates anew. The hungry of this verse mirror the hungry of verse 5, but now they have a home.
- 37.** Agriculture returns: fields (sador) are sown, vineyards (keramim) are planted, and the yield is peri tevu'ah ('fruit of produce, a productive harvest'). The cycle of fertility is restored by divine initiative.
- 38.** The blessing echoes Genesis 1:28: vayvarekem vayyirbu me'od ('He blessed them and they multiplied greatly'). Livestock (behemtam) are also protected: lo yam'it ('He does not diminish them'). Fertility extends to both human and animal populations.
- 39.** The cycle turns again: vayyim'atu vayyashochu ('they are diminished and brought low'). The causes are otser ('oppression, restraint'), ra'ah ('calamity, evil'), and yagon ('sorrow, grief'). The prosperity of verses 36-38 does not last — the human condition includes reversal and loss.
- 40.** God's sovereignty extends to the powerful: shofekh buz al nedivim ('He pours contempt on nobles'). The nedivim ('nobles, princes, generous ones') are humiliated. The phrase vayyat'em be-tohu lo darekh ('He makes them wander in chaos without a path') uses tohu — the primordial chaos of Genesis 1:2. The powerful are cast into the formless void. This echoes Job 12:21-24.
- 41.** The reversal: vaysagev evyon me-oni ('He sets the needy on high from affliction'). The verb sagav means to place in an inaccessibly high position — the needy are elevated beyond the reach of their oppressors. The families multiply katstsosn ('like flocks') — the imagery of pastoral abundance. The God who humbles nobles elevates the destitute.
- 42.** The moral response: the yesharim ('upright ones') see God's reversals and rejoice. The avlah ('wickedness, injustice') personified as shutting its mouth (qafetsah piha, 'it closes its mouth') means wickedness is silenced — it has no argument, no defense, no rebuttal. When God acts, evil has nothing to say.
- 43.** The closing verse is identical in tone to Hosea 14:10 ('Who is wise? Let him understand these things'). Both passages end a complex theological text with a wisdom invitation: the material has been presented; now the reader must discern its meaning. The psalm does not force its conclusion — it invites comprehension.

108

Summary: *A composite psalm attributed to David, formed by combining Psalm 57:8-12 (vv. 1-6) and Psalm 60:7-14 (vv. 7-14). The first half is a hymn of praise — David's heart is steadfast, he will awaken the dawn with music, he will praise God among the nations. The second half is a prayer for military victory — God has spoken from His sanctuary, allotting the territories of Israel, and David asks God to march with his armies against Edom. The combination creates a movement from worship to warfare, from praise to petition.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 108 is the clearest example of editorial composition in the Psalter — it is assembled from two pre-existing psalms and presented as a new unity. This is not plagiarism but liturgical adaptation: the editor selected a praise section and a military prayer and joined them for a specific occasion. The seam is visible but the logic is sound: praise prepares for petition. A heart that is steadfast in worship (v. 1) is the heart that can ask God for military help (v. 12). The psalm demonstrates that Israel's worship life was not static — existing texts were rearranged, recombined, and reapplied to new situations.*

Translation Friction: *The composite nature raises questions about authorship: if le-David ('of David') heads the psalm but the material comes from two other Davidic psalms, what does the superscription mean? The answer is likely that the attribution claims Davidic origin for the source material, and the editor combined them under that same attribution. The military language in the second half — God 'casting His sandal' on Edom, Moab as a 'washbasin' — uses imagery that can seem crude, but these are ancient expressions of sovereign territorial claim, drawn from legal and ritual conventions of the ancient Near East.*

Connections: *Verses 2-6 parallel Psalm 57:8-12 exactly. Verses 7-14 parallel Psalm 60:7-14. The territorial catalog in verses 8-10 echoes 2 Samuel 8, where David conquered the territories named. The question in verse 11 ('Who will bring me to the fortified city?') mirrors the situation in 2 Samuel 5:6-10 (the conquest of Jerusalem) or the Edomite campaigns. The cry 'Give us help against the adversary' (v. 13) anticipates every subsequent Israelite prayer for military deliverance.*

¹A song. A psalm of David.

²My heart is steadfast, O God;
I will sing and make music — even my glory will.

³Awake, harp and lyre!
I will awaken the dawn.

⁴I will give thanks to you among the peoples, O LORD;
I will make music to you among the nations.

⁵For your faithful love is higher than the heavens,
and your faithfulness reaches to the skies.

⁶Be exalted above the heavens, O God,
and let your glory be over all the earth.

⁷That your beloved ones may be rescued,
save with your right hand and answer me.

⁸God has spoken in His holiness:
'I will exult! I will divide Shechem
and measure out the Valley of Succoth.

⁹Gilead is mine, Manasseh is mine;
Ephraim is my helmet,
Judah is my scepter.

¹⁰Moab is my washbasin;
on Edom I hurl my sandal;
over Philistia I shout in triumph.'

¹¹Who will bring me to the fortified city?
Who will lead me to Edom?

¹²Have you not rejected us, O God?
You do not march out with our armies, O God.

¹³Give us help against the foe,
for human help is worthless.

¹⁴With God we will act valiantly;
He will trample our adversaries.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The double designation *shir mizmor* ('a song, a psalm') combines the general term for a song with the specific term for a psalm accompanied by instruments. The attribution *le-David* marks the composition as Davidic in origin.
2. The word *nakhon* ('firm, established, ready') describes a heart that has made its decision — there is no ambivalence. The steadfast heart is the prerequisite for everything that follows: praise, petition, and warfare. A divided heart cannot pray with authority.
3. David commands his instruments: *urah hannevel ve-khinnor* ('awake, harp and lyre!'). The instruments are personified as sleeping and summoned to consciousness. Then the magnificent claim: *a'irah shachar* ('I will awaken the dawn'). The psalmist's praise will begin before sunrise — he will not wait for the dawn to wake him; his music will wake the dawn. Worship precedes and summons the new day.
4. The audience expands beyond Israel: *ba-ammim* ('among the peoples') and *bale'ummim* ('among the nations'). David's praise is not private or parochial — it is performed before the watching world. The nations are the intended audience of Israel's worship.
5. The reason for universal praise: *chesed* and *emet* (here *amittekha*, 'your faithfulness/truth') are measured cosmically. God's *chesed* is *gadol me-al shamayim* ('great above the heavens') and His *emunah* reaches *ad shechakim* ('to the clouds, to the skies'). The vertical measurement echoes Psalm 103:11 — *chesed* spans the distance between earth and heaven, and here it exceeds even that.
6. The prayer *rumah al shamayim Elohim* ('be exalted above the heavens, O God') asks God to display His transcendence. The parallel — *ve-al kol ha-arets kevodekha* ('and over all the earth your glory') — asks for that transcendence to be visible everywhere. The praise section concludes by calling for God's *kavod* to fill the whole earth, echoing Isaiah 6:3.
7. The pivot from praise to petition: *le-ma'an yechaletssun yedidekha* ('so that your beloved ones may be delivered'). The *yedidim* ('beloved ones, dear ones') are Israel — God's cherished people. The plea *hoshi'ah yeminekha* ('save with your right hand') invokes God's power (the right hand is the hand of strength). The personal pronoun *va'aneni* ('and answer me') makes the petition specific to the king.
8. God speaks from His sanctuary (*be-qodsho*, 'in His holiness/sanctuary'). The divine speech is an oracle of territorial allotment: *achallequah Shechem* ('I will portion out Shechem') and *emeq Sukkot amadded* ('the Valley of Succoth I will measure out'). These are west-bank (Shechem) and east-bank (Succoth) territories. God divides the land as a sovereign distributing property.
9. God's claim continues: Gilead (Transjordan), Manasseh (the northern territory) — both belong to God. Ephraim is *ma'oz roshi* ('the protection of my head, my helmet') — the northern kingdom is God's military headgear. Judah is *mechoqeqi* ('my lawgiver, my scepter') — the southern kingdom is God's instrument of governance. The territories are reimagined as God's personal equipment: helmet and scepter, war and law.
10. The neighboring nations receive demeaning assignments: Moab is *sir rachatsi* ('my washbasin') — a vessel for foot-washing, the lowliest domestic object. On Edom, God hurls His *na'ali* ('my sandal') — either a gesture of ownership (Ruth 4:7, where a sandal transfers property) or contempt (throwing a shoe at someone). Over Philistia, God shouts in triumph (*etro'a'a*). The oracle reduces Israel's enemies to God's household items and conquest trophies.
11. David's question: *mi yovileni ir mivtsar* ('who will bring me to the fortified city?'). The *ir mivtsar* is likely Bozrah or Sela (Petra), the capital strongholds of Edom. The question implies military difficulty — Edom's cities are naturally fortified in rock. The second question — *mi nachani ad*

Edom ('who will lead me to Edom?') — is rhetorical: only God can accomplish this conquest.

12. The question turns accusatory: halo Elohim zenachtanu ('have you not rejected us, O God?'). The verb zanach ('to reject, to spurn, to cast off') implies God has withdrawn His support. The phrase ve-lo tetse Elohim be-tziv'oteinu ('and you do not go out with our armies, O God') means God is no longer marching at the head of Israel's troops. The theological crisis is military defeat interpreted as divine abandonment.
13. The petition: havah lanu ezrat mitsar ('give us help against the adversary'). The confession that follows is stark: ve-shav teshu'at adam ('and empty/worthless is the salvation of humanity'). The word shav means 'vain, empty, worthless.' Human military capability is nothing without God. This is not false modesty but hard-won theological realism: Israel's armies fail when God does not march with them.
14. The phrase na'aseh chayil ('we will do valiantly') is not a boast in human strength but a declaration of partnership with God. The 'we' is Israel; the enabling force is God. The psalm refuses both presumption (we can do it alone) and passivity (we can do nothing). With God, Israel acts.

109

Summary: *The most intense imprecatory psalm in the Psalter. David, attacked by enemies who return evil for good and hatred for love, calls down a devastating series of curses upon his chief accuser: let his days be few, let another take his office, let his children be orphans, let his descendants be cut off, let his name be blotted out. The central curse section (vv. 6-20) is among the most disturbing passages in the Psalms. The psalm frames these curses as a response to unprovoked malice and ends with a plea for God's salvation and a vow of praise.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 109 is the hardest psalm for modern readers to absorb. The curses are specific, personal, and generational — they target not just the enemy but his wife, his children, his memory. The psalm makes no attempt to soften this. Yet the structure reveals something crucial: the curses are not initiated by David but are David's prayer that his enemies' own methods be turned back upon them. Verse 17 is the key: 'He loved cursing — let it come upon him.' The imprecations are a request for divine retribution in kind. The psalm assumes a universe where moral actions generate consequences, and it asks God to let those consequences land. Acts 1:20 quotes verse 8 ('Let another take his office') and applies it to Judas Iscariot, making this psalm a prophetic text in early Christian interpretation.*

Translation Friction: *The central interpretive question is whether verses 6-20 are David's own words or a quotation of what his enemies said against him. Some scholars argue David is quoting his accusers' curses and then asking God to return those curses to their source. The Hebrew text does not clearly mark quotation, and either reading is grammatically possible. We follow the traditional reading that David is imprecating against his enemy, but the alternative reading has strong defenders. Either way, the theological challenge remains: can such curses be prayer? The psalm's answer is that bringing rage to God is better than taking vengeance personally. The imprecatory psalms channel violence into worship.*

Connections: *Acts 1:20 quotes verse 8 in reference to Judas: 'Let his habitation become desolate, and let another take his office.' This christological reading made Psalm 109 significant in the early church. The psalm's language of the poor and needy (vv. 22, 31) connects to the beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12). The phrase satan (accuser) in verse 6 connects to the heavenly adversary of Job 1-2 and Zechariah 3:1. The theme of returning evil for good (v. 5) echoes Psalm 35:12-14.*

¹For the music director. Of David. A psalm.
O God of my praise, do not be silent.

²For the mouth of the wicked and the mouth of deceit
are opened against me;
they speak against me with a lying tongue.

³Words of hatred surround me;
they attack me without cause.

⁴In return for my love they accuse me,
but I am all prayer.

⁵They repay me evil for good,
and hatred for my love.

⁶Appoint a wicked man over him,
and let an accuser stand at his right hand.

⁷When he is judged, let him come out guilty,
and let his prayer be counted as sin.

⁸Let his days be few;
let another take his position.

⁹Let his children be orphaned
and his wife a widow.

¹⁰Let his children wander as beggars;
let them seek bread far from their ruined homes.

¹¹Let the creditor seize all he has;
let strangers plunder his labor.

¹²Let no one extend faithful love to him,
and let no one show compassion to his orphans.

¹³Let his descendants be cut off;
in the next generation let their name be blotted out.

¹⁴Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the LORD,
and let the sin of his mother not be blotted out.

¹⁵Let their sins remain before the LORD continually,
that He may cut off their memory from the earth.

¹⁶Because he did not remember to show faithful love
but pursued the poor and needy,
the brokenhearted — to put them to death.

¹⁷He loved cursing — let it come upon him.
He did not delight in blessing — let it be far from him.

¹⁸He wore cursing as his garment —
let it enter his body like water
and his bones like oil.

¹⁹Let it be like a garment he wraps around himself,
like a belt he always wears.

²⁰Let this be the payment from the LORD to my accusers,
to those who speak evil against my soul.

²¹But you, O LORD my Lord,
act on my behalf for your name's sake.
Because your faithful love is good, rescue me.

²²For I am poor and needy,
and my heart is pierced within me.

²³I fade like a lengthening shadow;
I am shaken off like a locust.

²⁴My knees buckle from fasting,
and my body has grown thin, stripped of fat.

²⁵I have become a disgrace to them;
when they see me, they shake their heads.

²⁶Help me, O LORD my God;
save me according to your faithful love.

²⁷Let them know that this is your hand —
that you, O LORD, have done it.

²⁸Let them curse, but you will bless;
when they rise up, let them be put to shame,
but let your servant rejoice.

²⁹Let my accusers be clothed in disgrace;
let them wrap themselves in their own shame as in a robe.

³⁰I will give great thanks to the LORD with my mouth;
in the midst of the throng I will praise Him.

³¹For He stands at the right hand of the needy,
to save him from those who condemn his soul.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The superscription *la-menatseach* ('for the music director') indicates liturgical use. The address *Elohei tehillati* ('God of my praise') is significant — even in the psalm that will contain the harshest curses in Scripture, the opening word is praise. God is identified as the one David praises. The plea *al techerash* ('do not be silent') requests that God break His silence and act.
2. Two mouths attack: *pi rasha* ('the mouth of the wicked') and *pi mirmah* ('the mouth of deceit'). They have opened (*patachu*) against David — mouths as weapons, words as assault. The *leshon shaqer* ('tongue of falsehood') specifies the weapon: lies. The psalmist is under verbal attack from people who fabricate accusations.
3. The *divrei sin'ah* ('words of hatred') have surrounded (*sevavuni*) the psalmist — he is encircled by hostile speech. The phrase *vayyillachamuni chinnam* ('they fight against me for nothing, without cause') establishes the injustice: the attack is unprovoked. The word *chinnam* ('for nothing, freely, without reason') is the same word used in Job 1:9, where the Adversary asks whether Job fears God 'for nothing.' Here the enemies hate David for nothing.
4. The phrase *va-ani tefillah* ('but I — prayer') is one of the most compressed statements in the Psalter. No verb, no object — just the pronoun and the noun. David does not have prayers; he is prayer. His identity in the crisis has been reduced to the single act of addressing God.
5. The exchange is explicit: *ra'ah tachat tovah* ('evil in exchange for good') and *sin'ah tachat ahavati* ('hatred in exchange for my love'). The word *tachat* ('in exchange for, instead of') appears twice, emphasizing the substitution. This is the moral ground on which the imprecations stand: the enemies have reversed the moral order. David will now ask God to reverse it back.

6. The curse section begins. The verb hafqed ('appoint, set over') asks God to place a rasha ('wicked person') in authority over the enemy. The satan ya'amod al yemino ('let an accuser stand at his right hand') places a prosecuting figure at the enemy's right side — the position of the legal accuser in a courtroom. The word satan here is not the cosmic Satan but a human or angelic accuser.
7. The phrase be-hishshafto yetse rasha ('when he is judged, let him go out guilty') asks that every legal proceeding end in conviction. The phrase u-tefillato tiyeh lachata'ah ('and let his prayer become sin') is devastating — even the enemy's attempt to pray for mercy should itself be counted as an offense. When a person has exhausted all moral credit, even repentance is hollow.
8. The curse of shortened life: yihyu yamav me'attim ('let his days be few'). Then the political curse: pequddato yiqqach acher ('let another take his office/position'). The word pequddah means 'oversight, office, charge, position.' Acts 1:20 quotes the Septuagint of this verse and applies it to Judas Iscariot's vacant apostleship, which was then given to Matthias. This verse became the scriptural warrant for replacing Judas.
9. The curse extends to family: banav yetomim ('his children orphans') and ishto almanah ('his wife a widow'). The imprecation asks that the enemy's death (implied by v. 8) leave his family destitute. In the ancient Near East, orphans and widows were the most vulnerable members of society — they had no legal protector and no economic support.
10. The children's fate: noa yanu'u ('let them wander aimlessly, let them stagger') and ve-shi'elu ('let them beg'). The phrase me-chorvotaihem ('from their ruins') means their homes have been destroyed — they beg from the rubble of what was once a household. The progressive desolation is deliberate: death, then orphanhood, then homelessness, then begging.
11. Economic destruction: the nosheh ('creditor, money-lender') traps (yenaqqesh, from naqash, 'to ensnare') everything he owns. The zarim ('strangers, foreigners') plunder his yegi'o ('his labor, the product of his toil'). The enemy loses not only his life and family but his accumulated wealth. Everything he worked for goes to people who have no connection to him.
12. The curse now attacks social solidarity: al yehi lo moshekh chesed ('let there be no one to extend chesed to him'). The word moshekh ('one who draws out, who extends') means no one will reach out with covenant loyalty. Even his orphaned children (yetomav) will find no chonen ('one who shows grace'). The isolation is total — not only God but other humans will withdraw support.
13. The generational curse: acharito lehakhrit ('his posterity — for cutting off'). The enemy's line will end. The phrase be-dor acher yimmach shemam ('in the next generation let their name be blotted out') asks for total erasure — the name (shem) will be wiped from memory (machah, the same verb used for God blotting out sin). To lose one's name is to cease existing in any meaningful sense in the ancient world.
14. The curse reaches backward: the avon avotav ('iniquity of his fathers') should be remembered (yizzakher) by God, and the chattat immo ('sin of his mother') should not be blotted out. Where Psalm 103 celebrated God not dealing with us according to our sins, this psalm asks God to deal with the enemy exactly according to his ancestors' sins. The contrast is theologically intentional — chesed is for those who fear God; strict justice is for those who mock Him.
15. The ancestral sins should remain neged YHVH tamid ('before the LORD continually') — not filed away but permanently on display before the divine judge. The purpose: ve-yakhret me-erets zikhram ('that He may cut off their memory from the earth'). Complete erasure — no descendants, no name, no memory.
16. The phrase lo zakhar asot chesed ('he did not remember to do chesed') is the inverse of verse 45 in Psalm 106, where God 'remembered His covenant.' The enemy is the anti-God: where God remembers chesed, the enemy forgets it. Where God rescues the needy, the enemy hunts them. The curses ask God to treat the enemy as the enemy treated the poor.
17. The principle of retribution in kind: va-ye'ehav qelalah vattevo'ehu ('he loved cursing, and it came upon him'). The verb ahav ('to love') means the enemy chose cursing as his way of life — he embraced it. The request is simply that what he loved should arrive: let cursing find its lover. The parallel: lo chafets bivrahah ('he did not desire blessing'). Since he rejected blessing, let blessing withdraw (vattirchaq mimmennu, 'let it be far from him'). The logic is: you get what you chose.
18. The clothing metaphor: vayyilbash qelalah kemaddo ('he put on cursing like his robe'). Cursing was his wardrobe — he dressed in it daily. The penetration deepens: vatavo khammayim be-qirbo ('it entered like water into his innards') and kashshemen be-atmotav ('like oil into his bones'). Water soaks; oil penetrates. Cursing has saturated the enemy to the skeletal level. He is cursing all the way through.
19. The garment metaphor continues: the cursing should be ke-beged ya'teh ('like a robe he wraps himself in') and u-le-mezach tamid yachgerehah ('like a sash he constantly girds on'). The mezach ('belt, sash, girdle') is the foundational garment — the first thing put on and the last thing removed. Cursing has become the enemy's permanent wardrobe, his identity.
20. The curse section closes with a summary: zot pe'ullat sotnai me-et YHVH ('this is the wage of my accusers from the LORD'). The word pe'ullah ('wage, payment, reward') frames the curses as divine compensation — what the accusers have earned. The sotnai ('my accusers') uses the same root as satan in verse 6. The entire imprecatory section is a petition for God to pay the accusers what their accusations have earned.
21. The tone shifts dramatically: ve-attah YHVH Adonai ('but you, LORD, my Lord'). After twenty verses of cursing enemies, David turns to personal petition. The basis is not his own merit but le-ma'an shemekha ('for your name's sake') and ki tov chasdekha ('because your faithful love is good'). The same chesed that the enemy refused (v. 16) is now David's only hope.
22. David identifies himself with the very category his enemy attacked: ani ve-evyon anokhi ('poor and needy am I'). The same words from verse 16. The enemy persecuted the poor; David is the poor one. The phrase libbi chalal be-qirbi ('my heart is pierced within me') uses chalal ('pierced, wounded, slain'). His heart has been stabbed — not physically but by the betrayal described in verses 4-5.

23. Two images of insubstantiality: ke-tsel kinttoto nehelakhti ('like a shadow when it stretches, I am gone') echoes Psalm 102:12. The shadow dissolves into darkness. The second image — nin'arti ka-arbeh ('I am shaken off like a locust') — pictures a locust brushed off a garment. David feels disposable, insignificant, easily discarded.
24. Physical deterioration from fasting (tsom): birkai kashlu ('my knees stumble, they buckle'). The fasting may be penitential prayer or the involuntary starvation of persecution. The phrase u-vesari kachash mishshamen ('and my flesh has become lean, stripped of fat') describes emaciation — the body consuming itself.
25. David has become cherpah ('a reproach, an object of scorn'). The headshaking (yeniu'un rosham) is the gesture of mockery and contempt — they look at him and wag their heads in derision. The same gesture appears at the crucifixion (Matthew 27:39), and the early church read this verse as prophetic of Christ's suffering.
26. The petition is direct: ozreini YHVH Elohai ('help me, LORD my God'). The basis remains chesed: hoshi'eni ke-chasdekha ('save me according to your faithful love'). Not according to David's merit, not according to the severity of the situation, but according to the measure of God's chesed.
27. The purpose of the rescue: ve-yed'u ki yadekha zot ('let them know that this is your hand'). The salvation should be visibly divine — not ambiguous, not attributable to chance. The phrase attah YHVH asitah ('you, LORD, did it') makes the attribution explicit. David wants his enemies to see God's hand unmistakably.
28. The contrast between human cursing and divine blessing: yeqalelu hemmah ve-attah tevarekh ('they curse, but you bless'). The enemies' curses are impotent when set against God's blessing. The outcome: qamu vayyevoshu ('they rise up and are shamed'). The servant (avdekha) — David — will rejoice (yismach). The psalm moves from despair toward anticipated joy.
29. The clothing metaphor returns: the enemy wore cursing (v. 18-19); now let the accusers wear kelimmah ('disgrace, humiliation') and boshet ('shame'). The verb ya'atu ('let them wrap themselves') uses atah, the same verb from verse 19. The wardrobe has changed: cursing has been replaced by shame.
30. The vow of praise: odeh YHVH me'od be-fi ('I will thank the LORD greatly with my mouth'). The word me'od ('very much, exceedingly') intensifies the thanksgiving. The setting is public: u-vetokh rabbim ahalelennu ('in the midst of many I will praise Him'). The psalm that began with a plea for God to speak ('do not be silent,' v. 1) ends with David speaking — loudly, publicly, in praise.
31. The reversal between verse 6 and verse 31 is the psalm's structural and theological key. The accuser stands at the enemy's right hand; God stands at the needy's right hand. Condemnation for the oppressor; salvation for the oppressed. The psalm's moral universe is governed by this symmetry.

110

Summary: *The most quoted psalm in the New Testament. In seven compressed verses, the LORD (YHVH) addresses David's lord (adoni) with an oracle of enthronement, victory, and eternal priesthood. The psalm contains two divine utterances: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool' (v. 1) and 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek' (v. 4). Between and around these oracles, the psalm describes the messianic king's rule from Zion, his willing army, his dawn-born youth, and his judgment among the nations.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 110 is the single most important psalm for New Testament christology. It is quoted or alluded to over twenty times: Jesus cites it to challenge the Pharisees' understanding of the Messiah (Matthew 22:41-46), Peter quotes it in his Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:34-35), Paul draws on it in 1 Corinthians 15:25 and Ephesians 1:20, and the book of Hebrews builds its entire argument about Christ's priesthood on verse 4. The psalm's fusion of kingship and priesthood in one figure was revolutionary — in Israel, kings were from Judah and priests from Levi, and the two offices were never combined (King Uzziah was struck with leprosy for trying, 2 Chronicles 26:16-21). The Melchizedek reference bypasses the Levitical system entirely, reaching back to a pre-Mosaic, pre-Aaronic priestly order — a priest who was also a king of Salem (Genesis 14:18-20). This dual office is what made the psalm irresistible to the early church: Jesus was both king and priest, and Psalm 110 was the scriptural warrant.*

Translation Friction: *The Hebrew text of Psalm 110 is among the most difficult in the Psalter. Several phrases are obscure, the syntax is compressed to the point of ambiguity, and the imagery shifts rapidly. Verse 3 in particular is notoriously difficult — the Hebrew is uncertain at several points, and translations vary wildly. The phrase ne'um YHVH la-adoni ('declaration of the LORD to my lord') in verse 1 creates the theological puzzle Jesus exploited: if David calls the Messiah 'my lord,' how can the Messiah be David's son? The answer, for the New Testament authors, is that the Messiah is both David's descendant and David's Lord — human and divine. The Melchizedek priesthood in verse 4 is equally puzzling in its original context: why invoke a*

Canaanite priest-king from Abraham's era? The answer may be that the Davidic king, ruling from Jerusalem (the ancient Salem), inherits the pre-Israelite priestly traditions of that city.

Connections: Genesis 14:18-20 introduces Melchizedek as king of Salem and priest of God Most High. Hebrews 5-7 develops the Melchizedek priesthood at length, arguing that Christ's priesthood supersedes the Levitical system because it belongs to an earlier, higher order. Matthew 22:41-46 records Jesus using verse 1 to demonstrate that the Messiah cannot be merely David's biological descendant. Acts 2:34-35 makes verse 1 the climax of Peter's Pentecost argument for Christ's exaltation. 1 Corinthians 15:25 quotes verse 1 in the context of Christ's reign until all enemies are subdued. Hebrews 1:13 quotes verse 1 as the supreme enthronement text. The psalm is the theological bridge between the Old Testament expectation of a Davidic messiah and the New Testament proclamation of a divine Christ.

¹Of David. A psalm.

The declaration of the LORD to my lord:

'Sit at my right hand

until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'

²The LORD will extend your mighty scepter from Zion:

'Rule in the midst of your enemies.'

³Your people offer themselves willingly

on the day of your power.

In holy splendor, from the womb of the dawn,

the dew of your youth is yours.

⁴The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind:

'You are a priest forever

according to the order of Melchizedek.'

⁵The Lord at your right hand

will shatter kings on the day of His wrath.

⁶He judges among the nations, filling them with corpses;

He shatters the head over the wide earth.

⁷He will drink from the brook along the way;

therefore He will lift up His head.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The phrase ne'um YHVH ('declaration of the LORD') is prophetic language borrowed into a psalm — it marks what follows as direct divine speech, not the psalmist's meditation. The word adoni ('my lord') is distinct from Adonai (a divine title); adoni is used for a human superior. However, the figure addressed here exercises divine prerogatives (sitting at God's right hand), which is why the early church read 'my lord' as a christological title.
1. The right hand (yamin) of God is the position from which authority is exercised. Sitting there implies permanent co-regency. The New Testament applies this image to Christ's ascension: after the resurrection, Jesus 'sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high' (Hebrews 1:3).
2. The extension of the scepter from Zion means Jerusalem is the command center of the Messiah's reign. The early church understood this both literally (the gospel went out from Jerusalem, Acts 1:8) and typologically (Zion represents God's sovereign rule extending into a hostile world).
3. The textual difficulties in this verse have generated more scholarly debate than almost any other verse in the Psalter. The LXX reads 'from the womb before the morning star I begot you,' which the early church read as a statement about the Son's eternal generation from the Father. The Hebrew text is more opaque but equally suggestive: the Messiah's origin is connected to dawn, to dew, to birth — images of fresh beginning and supernatural vitality.
3. The word nedavot ('free-will offerings, voluntary contributions') means the people give themselves. The same word is used for voluntary sacrifices in Leviticus. The Messiah's army is a congregation of willing worshippers.

4. The phrase *al divrati* is difficult — it could mean 'according to the order of,' 'according to the manner of,' 'because of the matter of,' or 'on account of.' The LXX reads *kata ten taxin* ('according to the order'), and Hebrews follows this. Whatever the precise nuance, the meaning is clear: the Messiah's priesthood is patterned on Melchizedek's, not Aaron's.
4. The perpetuity *le-olam* ('forever') applied to the priesthood means this is not a temporary appointment. Hebrews 7:24 draws the inference: because the Messiah lives forever, His priesthood is permanent and His intercession unending.
5. The subject shifts: now *Adonai* ('the Lord') is at the Messiah's right hand — in verse 1, the Messiah was at God's right hand; now God stands at the Messiah's right hand. The positions are reciprocal. The verb *machats* ('He shatters, He strikes through, He wounds fatally') describes devastating military action. The *melakhim* ('kings') are the hostile rulers of the earth. The *be-yom appo* ('on the day of His wrath') is the eschatological day of judgment when God's patience expires and His wrath is unleashed.
6. The judgment is global: *yadin baggoyim* ('He judges among the nations') with *male geviyyot* ('filling with corpses'). The scale is total war — the battlefield is covered with the dead. The phrase *machats rosh al erets rabbah* ('He shatters the chief/head over a wide land') could mean 'He crushes the head ruler over a great land' or 'He crushes heads across a vast territory.' The word *rosh* ('head') may refer to a specific leader (the chief enemy) or to heads generally (the casualties). Either way, the judgment is comprehensive and devastating.
7. The final verse has puzzled interpreters for centuries. The simplest reading is military: a warrior-king, in pursuit of fleeing enemies, pauses at a stream to drink and then lifts his head to continue the chase, refreshed. The christological reading is more layered: the Messiah who endures suffering (drinking from the stream of trial) is the same one who is exalted (lifting His head in triumph). The brevity and ambiguity are part of the psalm's power — it says just enough and stops.

111

Summary: *Psalm 111 is an acrostic hymn of praise in which each half-line begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet, moving from aleph to tav across twenty-two units. The psalmist praises the LORD in the assembly of the upright for His mighty works: His covenant faithfulness, His provision of food, His gift of the land, His justice, His trustworthy commands, and His redemption of His people. The psalm climaxes with the declaration that the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The acrostic structure is the psalm's most striking formal feature — the poet praises God within the constraint of alphabetic order, as if declaring that the LORD's works fill every letter of the language. Psalm 111 and Psalm 112 form a matched pair: 111 describes who God is and what He does; 112 describes the person who fears God and mirrors those divine qualities. The vocabulary deliberately echoes between the two psalms — the words used for God's character in 111 reappear as the character of the righteous person in 112. The phrase 'the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom' (v. 10) connects this psalm to the wisdom tradition (Proverbs 1:7, 9:10, Job 28:28) and positions praise as a form of knowing.*

Translation Friction: *The Hebrew acrostic structure is impossible to reproduce in English without distorting the content. Each line of the psalm is extremely compressed — the poet is working under severe formal constraints, and the result reads more like a catalog of divine attributes than a flowing poem. Some scholars debate whether verse 1 is part of the acrostic (the opening Hallelujah stands outside the twenty-two-line count) or whether the acrostic begins with the first word after the Hallelujah. The WLC treats the Hallelujah as part of the verse text.*

Connections: *Psalm 111 is the first half of an acrostic diptych with Psalm 112. Together they form a theological statement: the God described in 111 produces the person described in 112. The wisdom conclusion in verse 10 links to Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10. The covenant and redemption language (vv. 5, 9) connects to the Exodus and Sinai traditions. The psalm is liturgically associated with the Egyptian Hallel collection (Psalms 113-118) that follows immediately.*

1Praise the LORD!

I will thank the LORD with all my heart,
in the council of the upright and in the congregation.

**2Great are the works of the LORD,
studied by all who delight in them.**

³Splendor and majesty mark His work,
and His righteousness stands forever.

⁴He has made a memorial of His wonders;
the LORD is gracious and compassionate.

⁵He gives food to those who fear Him;
He remembers His covenant forever.

⁶He declared the power of His works to His people,
giving them the inheritance of the nations.

⁷The works of His hands are truth and justice;
all His precepts are trustworthy.

⁸They are established forever and ever,
carried out in truth and uprightness.

⁹He sent redemption to His people;
He commanded His covenant forever.
Holy and awe-inspiring is His name.

¹⁰The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;
good understanding belongs to all who practice it.
His praise endures forever.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The acrostic begins here: aleph (odeh) and bet (besod) are the first two letters. Each half-verse advances one letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The word sod ('council, intimate circle') suggests a smaller gathering within the larger edah ('congregation'). The phrase bekol levav ('with all my heart') uses levav rather than lev — the two forms are interchangeable in meaning, though levav appears more commonly in Deuteronomic and poetic texts.
2. The gimel and dalet lines of the acrostic. The participle derushim ('sought, studied') implies ongoing investigation, not a single act of observation. The phrase lekhol cheftzehem ('by all who delight in them') could also be read as 'according to all their desires' — the works of the LORD meet every inquiry.
3. The he and vav lines. The pair hod ve-hadar appears together in Psalm 104:1, 1 Chronicles 16:27, and Job 40:10, always describing divine or royal splendor. The noun po'olo ('His work') is singular — it refers to the totality of God's activity rather than to individual acts.
4. The zayin and chet lines. The phrase channun ve-rachum ('gracious and compassionate') reverses the usual Exodus 34:6 order (rachum ve-channun) — likely for acrostic purposes, since chet must come after zayin. The reversal is not theologically significant but shows the poet adapting traditional language to the alphabetic constraint.
5. The tet and yod lines. The word teref literally means 'torn food, prey' — what an animal brings back after hunting. Applied to God, it means provision. Some scholars connect this to the manna and quail in the wilderness; others see it as a general statement about divine provision. The covenant (berit) here is most likely the Sinai covenant, though the psalmist may also have the Abrahamic land promise in view given verse 6.
6. The kaf and lamed lines. The 'inheritance of the nations' refers to the land of Canaan, which God allocated to Israel as promised to Abraham. The verb higgid ('He declared, made known') implies revelation — God showed His people what He could do so they would trust Him for what He was about to do.
7. The mem and nun lines. The noun piqqudim ('precepts, instructions') is relatively rare outside the Psalms and refers to God's detailed instructions or charges. The adjective ne'emanim ('trustworthy') comes from the root aman, which also produces emunah ('faithfulness') and amen ('so be it, it is reliable').
8. The samekh and ayin lines. The adjective semukhim ('established, supported, upheld') comes from the root samakh ('to lean on, to support') — God's precepts are stable, something a person can lean on without collapse. The phrase be'emet ve-yashar ('in truth and uprightness') describes the manner of their execution: straight, without crookedness or deception.

9. The pe, tsade, and qof lines. The verb tsivvah ('He commanded') applied to the covenant is unusual — normally one 'cuts' (karat) a covenant. Using tsivvah emphasizes that the covenant is an authoritative act of the divine will, not a negotiation. The adjective nora ('awe-inspiring, fearsome') is rendered here as 'awe-inspiring' rather than 'terrible' or 'dreadful' to capture the reverence rather than terror.
10. The resh, shin, and tav lines complete the acrostic. The phrase resh chokhmah parallels Proverbs 1:7 (reshit da'at) and Proverbs 9:10 (techillat chokhmah). The pronoun in lekhol oseihem ('all who do them') is ambiguous — 'them' could refer to the commandments or to the acts of wisdom. Most interpreters take it as referring to the commandments. The final line, tehillato omedet la'ad, mirrors verse 3b (tzidqato omedet la'ad), creating a frame: God's righteousness endures, and so does His praise.

112

Summary: *Psalm 112 is the second half of an acrostic pair with Psalm 111. Where Psalm 111 described God's character, Psalm 112 describes the person who fears God — and the vocabulary deliberately mirrors the previous psalm. The righteous person is generous, just, compassionate, stable, unafraid, and ultimately vindicated. The psalm paints a portrait of the blessed life rooted in covenant faithfulness, ending with the frustration of the wicked who watch the righteous flourish.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The mirroring between Psalms 111 and 112 is the key to both. In 111:3, God's righteousness endures forever; in 112:3, the righteous person's righteousness endures forever. In 111:4, God is gracious and compassionate; in 112:4, the righteous person is gracious and compassionate. The implication is that the one who fears God becomes like God — covenant relationship produces character transformation. The person described in Psalm 112 is not merely obedient but is becoming a reflection of the divine character described in Psalm 111. This is one of the clearest statements of the imago Dei principle in the Psalter.*

Translation Friction: *The psalm's confident promise of material prosperity for the righteous (wealth, descendants, victory over enemies) sits in tension with the experience of suffering righteous people — a tension the book of Job addresses at length. The psalm operates within the Deuteronomic framework where obedience leads to blessing and disobedience to curse. The final verse, describing the wicked gnashing their teeth as the righteous prosper, reflects a retributive worldview that other psalms (notably Psalm 73) will complicate significantly.*

Connections: *Psalm 112 is inseparable from Psalm 111 — they are two halves of a single theological statement. The 'fear of the LORD' that concludes Psalm 111:10 immediately becomes the opening quality of the blessed person in 112:1. Paul quotes Psalm 112:9 in 2 Corinthians 9:9 to describe the generous giver. The portrait of the righteous person here anticipates the beatitudes of Matthew 5 and the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5. The wicked gnashing their teeth in verse 10 is language Jesus uses in the parables of judgment (Matthew 13:42, 50).*

1Praise the LORD!

Blessed is the person who fears the LORD,
who delights greatly in His commandments.

**2His descendants will be mighty in the land;
the generation of the upright will be blessed.**

**3Wealth and riches fill his house,
and his righteousness endures forever.**

**4Light dawns in the darkness for the upright —
gracious, compassionate, and righteous.**

**5It goes well for the person who is generous and lends;
he conducts his affairs with justice.**

⁶He will never be shaken;
the righteous person will be remembered forever.

⁷He does not fear bad news;
his heart is steady, trusting in the LORD.

⁸His heart is secure; he will not be afraid
until he looks in triumph on his adversaries.

⁹He scatters gifts; he gives to the needy.
His righteousness endures forever;
his horn is lifted high in honor.

¹⁰The wicked person sees it and is enraged;
he gnashes his teeth and wastes away.
The desire of the wicked will come to nothing.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The acrostic begins: aleph (ashrei) and bet (bemitzvotav). The word ashrei is a plural construct meaning something like 'the happinesses of' — it describes a state of flourishing rather than a momentary emotion. The verb chafetz ('to delight, to desire') is the same root used in Psalm 111:2 for those who 'delight' in God's works, creating a verbal link between the two psalms.
2. The gimel and dalet lines. The word gibbor ('mighty, powerful, warrior') applied to zar'o ('his seed, his offspring') promises that covenant faithfulness produces strong descendants. The word ba'aretz ('in the land') can mean 'in the earth' generally or 'in the land' of Israel specifically — in a psalm rooted in covenant theology, the land of promise is likely in view.
3. The he and vav lines. The exact phrase tzidqato omedet la'ad appears in both 111:3 and 112:3 — this is the clearest verbal bridge between the two psalms and the key to their paired meaning.
4. The zayin and chet lines. The grammatical subject of channun ve-rachum ve-tzaddiq is debated — it could be God (He is the light that rises) or the righteous person (who is described as gracious, compassionate, and righteous). The deliberate echo of 111:4 suggests the poet wants readers to hear both: God is this way, and the person who fears God becomes this way.
5. The tet and yod lines. The word chonen ('showing grace, being generous') echoes channun from the previous verse — the righteous person does not merely possess the quality of graciousness but acts on it through lending. The verb yekhalkel ('he sustains, he manages') means he handles his devarav ('his words, his affairs') with mishpat ('justice, right judgment').
6. The kaf and lamed lines. The verb yimmot ('be shaken, be moved, totter') is the same word used for cosmic stability — mountains that do not shake, the earth that does not totter. The righteous person shares in that stability. The phrase lezekher olam ('for eternal remembrance') connects to Psalm 111:4 where God 'made a memorial' (zekher) of His wonders — now the righteous person becomes a memorial.
7. The mem and nun lines. The word nakhon ('established, steady') is a Niphal participle of kun ('to establish, to make firm') — the heart has been made firm by something outside itself, namely trust in the LORD. The verb batuach ('trusting') is a stative participle: this is an ongoing condition, not a momentary decision.
8. The samekh and ayin lines. The word samukh ('supported, upheld') echoes Psalm 111:8 where God's precepts are semukhim ('established'). The righteous person's heart has the same quality as God's commands — both are firm, both stand. The phrase ad asher yir'eh betzarav ('until he looks upon his adversaries') implies confident waiting: the righteous person will eventually see vindication.
9. The pe, tsade, and qof lines. Paul quotes this verse in 2 Corinthians 9:9 to encourage generosity among the Corinthian believers. The 'horn' (qeren) is a widespread ancient Near Eastern metaphor for power and dignity — a raised horn is a sign of victory and honor, a lowered horn is defeat and shame.
10. The resh, shin, and tav lines complete the acrostic. The verb namas ('to melt, to dissolve') is used elsewhere for hearts melting in fear (Joshua 2:11) and for wax melting before fire (Psalm 68:3). Applied to the wicked person, it suggests a total loss of substance and strength. The noun ta'avah ('desire, craving, longing') refers to what the wicked person most wants — and it will perish (toveid, from avad, 'to be lost, to perish').

113

Summary: *Psalm 113 opens the Egyptian Hallel (Psalms 113-118), the collection of praise psalms sung during the Passover meal. The psalm calls the servants of the LORD to praise His name from sunrise to sunset, then declares that the LORD is exalted above all nations and above the heavens — yet He stoops down to look at what happens below. The psalm climaxes with concrete examples of His condescension: He lifts the poor from the dust, raises the needy from the ash heap, and gives the barren woman a home and children.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The theological center of this psalm is the paradox of divine transcendence and condescension. The LORD is so exalted that He must humble Himself even to look at the heavens — the heavens are beneath Him. Yet this infinitely exalted God concerns Himself with the lowest members of human society: the dust-covered poor, the ash-heap beggar, the childless woman. The psalm's structure enacts this movement: it begins by looking up (God's name above everything) and ends by looking down (God reaching into the lowest places). This is the psalm that sets the tone for the entire Passover Hallel — the God who delivered Israel from Egypt is the God who notices the forgotten.*

Translation Friction: *The barren woman receiving children (v. 9) is celebrated without qualification, reflecting the ancient Near Eastern cultural context in which childlessness was a severe social and economic vulnerability for women. Modern readers may find the equation of female blessing with childbearing reductive, but in the psalm's context, the point is not that motherhood defines women but that God reverses the specific condition that caused this woman's suffering and marginalization.*

Connections: *Psalm 113 is the first psalm of the Egyptian Hallel, sung before the Passover meal (113-114 before the meal, 115-118 after). Jesus and His disciples would have sung this psalm at the Last Supper (Matthew 26:30). Hannah's prayer (1 Samuel 2:1-10) is a close parallel — the lifting of the poor and the giving of children to the barren are central themes of both. Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) draws heavily on both Hannah's prayer and this psalm.*

1Praise the LORD!

Praise, you servants of the LORD —
praise the name of the LORD!

2Let the name of the LORD be blessed
from now until forever.

3From the rising of the sun to its setting,
the name of the LORD is to be praised.

4The LORD is exalted above all nations;
His glory is above the heavens.

5Who is like the LORD our God,
who is enthroned on high,

6who stoops down to look
at the heavens and the earth!

7He raises the poor from the dust;
He lifts the needy from the ash heap,

to seat them with nobles,
with the nobles of His people.

He gives the childless woman a home,
making her a joyful mother of children.
Praise the LORD!

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The triple hallelu ('praise') creates an urgent, layered call to worship. The addressees are avdei YHWH ('servants of the LORD') — a term that can refer to the Levitical singers, to all Israel, or to anyone who serves the LORD. The object of praise is shem YHWH ('the name of the LORD') — not merely the person of God but His revealed identity, His reputation, His character as known.
2. The jussive yehi ('let it be') expresses a wish that God's name be mevorakh ('blessed') — acknowledged, honored, praised — from this moment into eternity. The phrase me'attah ve-ad olam ('from now and until forever') stretches the praise across all time.
3. Mi-mizrach shemesh ad mevo'o ('from the rising of the sun to its going in') covers the full arc of the day and, by extension, the full extent of the earth. The praise of the LORD is not limited to one place or one time — it fills all space and all hours.
4. The sequence builds: above all nations (v. 4a), above the heavens (v. 4b), and then in the next verse, He looks down. The word ram ('high, exalted') is the same root as the verb rum used throughout the Psalms for divine and royal exaltation.
5. The rhetorical question mi ka-YHWH Eloheinu ('who is like the LORD our God?') expects the answer: no one. The participle ha-magbihi lashevet ('who makes high to sit' / 'who is enthroned on high') describes God as seated at the highest possible point. The verb gavah ('to be high') in the Hiphil means 'to make high' — God has elevated His own throne above everything.
6. Verses 5-6 form a single sentence: God is the one who is enthroned on high AND who humbles Himself to look. The juxtaposition is the psalm's central theological statement. The verb mashpili is a Hiphil participle — God is actively, continuously condescending.
7. This verse closely parallels Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2:8. The ashpot appears in that passage as well, and the verbal and thematic overlap is so strong that most scholars consider one text dependent on the other. The movement from dust to ash heap intensifies the degradation; the movement from dal to evyon intensifies the vulnerability.
8. The verb hoshivi ('to cause to sit, to seat') places the formerly destitute person among nedivim ('nobles, princes, generous ones'). The word nadiv can mean either a person of high social rank or a person of generous character — both senses may be intended. The phrase nedivei ammo ('the nobles of His people') specifies that these are the leaders of God's own people, not foreign dignitaries. The reversal is total: from the ash heap to the seat of honor.
9. The word aqeret ('barren') comes from the root aqar ('to uproot') — barrenness is experienced as being uprooted, disconnected from the future. The transformation from aqeret to em ('mother') echoes the stories of Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Hannah — all barren women whose children became foundational figures in Israel's history. The final Hallelujah closes the psalm with the same word that opened it, creating a frame of praise.

114

Summary: Psalm 114 is a compact, vivid poem celebrating the Exodus from Egypt. In eight verses, the psalmist recounts how the sea fled, the Jordan turned back, the mountains skipped like rams, and the hills leaped like lambs — all because the earth trembled at the presence of the LORD, the God of Jacob, who turned rock into a pool of water and flint into a spring.

What Makes This Remarkable: This is one of the most cinematically powerful poems in the Psalter. The personification is extraordinary: the sea 'sees' and 'flees,' the Jordan 'turns back,' the mountains 'skip' like rams. The poet addresses creation directly — 'What is wrong with you, Sea, that you flee?' — as if cross-examining witnesses at a trial. The entire Exodus event is compressed into a cosmic drama where nature itself responds to God's presence with something between terror and ecstasy. No human actors are named — not Moses, not Aaron, not Pharaoh. The only actors are God, Israel, and creation. The psalm strips the Exodus to its theological core: God showed up, and the physical world rearranged itself.

Translation Friction: The psalm's brevity is itself a kind of friction — the Exodus was a complex series of events involving plagues, negotiations, military pursuit, and wilderness wandering, yet this poem reduces it all to a single moment of divine appearance. The merging of the Red Sea crossing and the Jordan crossing (events separated by forty years) into a single poetic moment raises the question of whether the psalm is describing history or theology. The answer is both: the psalm treats the entire Exodus-to-Conquest sequence as a single act of divine self-revelation.

Connections: Psalm 114 is the second psalm of the Egyptian Hallel (113-118), sung during the Passover meal. Its imagery of the fleeing sea connects to Exodus 14-15 (the Song of the Sea). The Jordan turning back echoes Joshua 3-4. Mountains skipping recalls the Sinai theophany (Exodus 19, Judges 5:5). Water from rock points to Exodus 17:6 and Numbers 20:11. Jesus and His disciples sang this psalm at the Last Supper.

¹When Israel went out from Egypt,
the house of Jacob from a people of foreign speech —

²Judah became His sanctuary,
Israel His dominion.

³The sea looked and fled;
the Jordan turned back.

⁴The mountains skipped like rams,
the hills like young sheep.

⁵What is wrong with you, Sea, that you flee?
Jordan, that you turn back?

⁶Mountains, why do you skip like rams?
Hills, like young sheep?

⁷Tremble, O earth, before the Lord,
before the God of Jacob —

⁸who turned the rock into a pool of water,
the flint into a flowing spring.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The opening betzet ('when [they] went out') places the entire psalm in the moment of departure. The parallel between Yisra'el ('Israel') and beit Ya'aqov ('house of Jacob') uses both names for the nation — the covenantal name and the family-origin name. The Egyptians are described as am lo'ez ('a people of foreign/barbarous speech') — the word lo'ez suggests unintelligible, alien language, emphasizing the cultural foreignness of Egypt.
2. The use of 'Judah' rather than 'Israel' for the sanctuary may reflect the southern location of the Temple in Jerusalem. The plural mamshelotav ('His dominions') is unusual — it may be a plural of majesty or may refer to the multiple tribal territories that together constitute God's realm.
3. The verb ra'ah ('it saw') raises the question: what did the sea see? The psalm does not say explicitly — the object is left unstated, creating suspense that verse 7 will resolve (the presence of the Lord). The personification of water as a creature that sees and flees is among the most striking images in Hebrew poetry.
4. The Sinai theophany is in view — Exodus 19:18 says the whole mountain trembled violently. But the psalmist reimagines the trembling as dancing. The comparison to rams and lambs domesticates the cosmic event, making the mountains into God's flock. The word order places the verb first for dramatic emphasis: 'Skipped — the mountains — like rams.'
5. The shift from third person narrative (vv. 3-4) to second person direct address (vv. 5-6) is a dramatic move. The psalmist speaks to creation as a witness, demanding an account. The imperfect verbs tanus ('you flee') and tissov ('you turn back') switch from the past-tense narration to present-tense confrontation — the events are re-experienced in the moment of singing.

6. The interrogation continues: the mountains and hills are now addressed directly and asked why they danced. The repetition of the exact imagery from verse 4 but in question form transforms the description into a demand for explanation. The entire created order is called to testify about what it experienced.
7. The word Adon ('Lord, Master') here is not the divine name YHWH but the title of sovereignty. The verb chuli is an imperative: the psalmist commands the earth to tremble. The previous questions were rhetorical — the earth was already trembling — but now the command makes the response mandatory and ongoing: every encounter with this God should produce the same reaction.
8. The participle hofkhi ('who turns') is present-tense in form, suggesting this is not merely a past event but an ongoing characteristic of God: He is the one who turns rock into water. The challamish ('flint') is the hardest type of stone — the contrast between flint and flowing spring is maximized for poetic effect.

115

Summary: *Psalm 115 is a liturgical psalm that moves from a plea for God's glory to a devastating satire on idols, then to a threefold call for Israel to trust the LORD, and finally to a blessing and a declaration of praise. The psalm contrasts the living God who acts from heaven with the dead idols who have mouths but cannot speak, eyes but cannot see, ears but cannot hear. The worshipers of those idols, the psalmist warns, become like them.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The idol satire in verses 4-8 is among the most cutting passages in the Hebrew Bible. The psalmist catalogs the sensory organs of the idols — mouths, eyes, ears, noses, hands, feet, throats — and declares each one non-functional. The idols are a complete inversion of life: they have the form of a living being but none of the substance. The devastating conclusion in verse 8 is that the makers and worshipers of these idols 'become like them' — they too lose the capacity to speak, see, hear, and act. Idolatry does not merely offend God; it dehumanizes the worshiper. You become what you worship.*

Translation Friction: *The psalm's sharp division between Israel (who trusts the LORD) and the nations (who make idols) can feel exclusivist to modern readers. However, the psalm's critique is directed at the objects of worship, not at the worshipers as persons — the concern is that idol worship degrades human beings by orienting them toward dead things. The statement that 'the dead do not praise the LORD' (v. 17) reflects the Hebrew Bible's general uncertainty about the state of the dead, where Sheol is often described as a place of silence rather than of worship.*

Connections: *Psalm 115 is part of the Egyptian Hallel (113-118), sung after the Passover meal. The idol satire parallels Isaiah 44:9-20 and Jeremiah 10:1-16. The threefold call to trust (Israel, house of Aaron, those who fear the LORD) appears also in Psalm 118:2-4 and Psalm 135:19-20. The 'you become like what you worship' principle is echoed in Romans 1:21-23 where Paul describes humanity exchanging the glory of God for images.*

¹Not to us, LORD, not to us,
but to Your name give glory,
for the sake of Your faithful love,
for the sake of Your faithfulness.

²Why should the nations say,
"Where is their God?"

³But our God is in the heavens;
He does whatever He pleases.

⁴Their idols are silver and gold,
crafted by human hands.

⁵They have mouths but cannot speak;
they have eyes but cannot see.

⁶They have ears but cannot hear;
they have noses but cannot smell.

⁷Their hands cannot feel;
their feet cannot walk.
No sound comes from their throat.

⁸Those who make them become like them —
so does everyone who trusts in them.

⁹Israel, trust in the LORD!
He is their help and their shield.

¹⁰House of Aaron, put your trust in the LORD!
He is their help and their shield.

¹¹You who fear the LORD, put your trust in the LORD!
He is their help and their shield.

¹²The LORD remembers us — He will bless.
He will bless the house of Israel;
He will bless the house of Aaron.

¹³He will bless those who fear the LORD,
the small and the great alike.

¹⁴May the LORD give you increase,
you and your children.

¹⁵You are blessed by the LORD,
the maker of heaven and earth.

¹⁶The heavens belong to the LORD,
but the earth He has given to the children of humanity.

¹⁷The dead do not praise the LORD,
nor do any who go down into silence.

¹⁸But we will bless the LORD
from now until forever.
Praise the LORD!

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The word *chesed* is rendered 'faithful love' — it carries the sense of covenant loyalty, committed kindness, and steadfast devotion. The word *emet* here functions as 'faithfulness' or 'reliability' rather than abstract 'truth.' Together, *chesed* and *emet* form one of the most important word pairs in the Hebrew Bible, describing the twin pillars of God's covenant character.
2. The taunt *ayyeh na Eloheim* ('where, then, is their God?') is a challenge to God's existence or power. The nations look at Israel's circumstances and conclude that Israel's God is absent or impotent. The psalmist raises this taunt not to validate it but to set up the answer that follows.
3. The verb *chafetz* ('He desires, He pleases') is the same root used in Psalm 112:1 for the person who 'delights' in God's commandments. The God of Israel is characterized by effective will — He desires and He does. This is the fundamental contrast with idols, which have no will and no capacity to act.

4. The word atzabbeihem ('their idols') comes from the root atzav, which can mean 'to shape, to form' but also 'to grieve, to cause pain.' The idols are shaped objects that cause grief. They are kesef ve-zahav ('silver and gold') — valuable materials, but still materials. And they are ma'aseh yedei adam ('the work of human hands') — made by the very creatures they are supposed to serve. The maker is greater than the made; the worshiper has degraded himself by bowing to his own handiwork.
5. The satire begins its catalog. The peh ('mouth') is the organ of speech, of command, of blessing — the idols have the form but not the function. The einayim ('eyes') are the organs of perception, of attention, of care — the idols have the shape but not the sight. Each line follows the same devastating pattern: they have X but cannot do what X does.
6. The catalog continues. The oznayim ('ears') cannot shama ('hear') — the God of Israel hears prayer, but these objects cannot receive any communication. The af ('nose') cannot reach ('smell') — the nose was particularly significant in ancient Near Eastern worship because incense offerings were understood as a pleasing aroma to the deity. An idol with a nose that cannot smell cannot receive the very offerings placed before it.
7. The catalog reaches its climax. The yadayim ('hands') cannot yamish ('feel, touch, handle') — they cannot act, cannot intervene, cannot rescue. The raglayim ('feet') cannot halakh ('walk') — they cannot come to anyone's aid, cannot move toward the one who prays. The final line is the most damning: lo yehgu bigronam ('they do not murmur in their throat') — they cannot even produce the most basic sound. The garon ('throat') that should produce voice produces nothing. Total silence. Total impotence.
8. The verb yihyu ('they will become') is future — the transformation is progressive and ongoing. The principle stated here is foundational: you become what you worship. This is not a curse imposed from outside but an organic consequence of misdirected devotion.
9. The threefold call to trust begins. Israel as a whole is addressed first. The verb betach ('trust') is an imperative — this is a command, not a suggestion. The LORD is described as ezram u-maginnam ('their help and their shield') — active assistance and protective covering. The shift from second person ('trust') to third person ('their help') suggests a liturgical antiphon: one voice calls, another responds.
10. The second call addresses beit Aharon ('house of Aaron') — the priestly families who serve in the Temple. Even those closest to God's presence need the command to trust. The refrain is identical: ezram u-maginnam hu ('He is their help and their shield').
11. The third call addresses yir'ei YHWH ('those who fear the LORD') — a category broader than ethnic Israel, potentially including God-fearing non-Israelites. This three-part structure (Israel, house of Aaron, God-fearers) creates concentric circles of covenant community. The refrain remains unchanged: the help and shield are the same for all who trust.
12. The verb zekharanu ('He has remembered us') shifts from command to confidence — after calling for trust, the psalm now affirms that God is already acting. The threefold yevarekh ('He will bless') mirrors the threefold call to trust. God's blessing follows the same three-part structure: Israel, house of Aaron, and (in the next verse) those who fear the LORD.
13. The blessing extends to yir'ei YHWH ('those who fear the LORD') — completing the threefold pattern. The phrase ha-qetannim im ha-gedolim ('the small with the great') emphasizes that God's blessing is not proportional to human status. The servant and the king, the child and the elder, the insignificant and the powerful all receive the same divine attention.
14. The verb yosef ('may He add, may He increase') is a jussive expressing a blessing-wish. The increase is aleikhem ('upon you') and al beneikhem ('and upon your children') — the blessing is generational, extending to descendants. This echoes the Abrahamic promise of multiplication.
15. Berukhim attem la-YHWH ('blessed are you by the LORD') — the passive participle declares the blessing as already in effect. The LORD is identified as oseh shamayim va-arets ('maker of heaven and earth') — a creation title that contrasts sharply with the idols who are ma'aseh yedei adam ('the work of human hands'). The creator God blesses; the created idols cannot.
16. This verse is sometimes read as limiting God's involvement with earth, but in the context of a psalm that has just affirmed God's active blessing, provision, and increase on earth, the point is not divine absence but human responsibility. The earth is given — it is a trust, not an abandonment.
17. Lo ha-metim yehalelu Yah ('the dead do not praise the LORD') — in the Hebrew understanding of death, Sheol is a place of silence, inactivity, and cessation of worship. The phrase yordei dumah ('those who go down into silence') is a poetic name for the dead and for the realm of death. Dumah means 'silence' — the opposite of praise. This verse functions as motivation: praise God now, because the dead cannot.
18. Va-anachnu nebarekh Yah ('but we — we will bless the LORD') — the emphatic pronoun anachnu sets up a contrast with the dead of the previous verse. The dead are silent; we will speak. The phrase me'attah ve-ad olam ('from now until forever') matches Psalm 113:2, creating a frame around the Hallel collection. The final Hallelujah closes the psalm with the word that opened it.

116

Summary: *Psalm 116 is a thanksgiving psalm in which an individual who was near death recounts how the LORD heard his cry and delivered him. The psalmist declares his love for the LORD, describes the cords of death and the anguish of Sheol that had seized him, and testifies that the LORD saved his life. He then asks what he can return to God for such deliverance and answers his own question: he will lift the cup of salvation, call on the LORD's name, pay his vows, and offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving — all in the presence of God's people, in the courts of the LORD's house.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The psalm's most theologically significant line may be verse 15: 'Precious in the eyes of the LORD is the death of His faithful ones.' This has been read in two very different ways — either that God values the death of His saints (making their death a weighty, significant event that He does not treat lightly) or that God considers their death too costly to allow (making 'precious' mean 'expensive, not to be spent cheaply'). Both readings are grammatically possible, and the context of a psalm about deliverance from death favors the second: God does not let His faithful ones die carelessly. The psalm's structure moves from crisis (vv. 1-4) to deliverance (vv. 5-9) to response (vv. 10-19), modeling the pattern of lament-salvation-thanksgiving that structures much of Israel's worship.*

Translation Friction: *The LXX divides this psalm into two separate psalms (114 and 115 in LXX numbering), splitting at approximately verse 10. This division reflects an ancient debate about whether the psalm is one composition or two. The Hebrew text (followed by the WLC) treats it as a single psalm. The phrase 'I believed, therefore I spoke' (v. 10) is quoted by Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:13, but in a context quite different from the original — Paul applies it to his own suffering and hope of resurrection, extending the psalm's meaning beyond its original scope.*

Connections: *Psalm 116 is part of the Egyptian Hallel (113-118), sung at Passover. Jesus would have sung this psalm at the Last Supper, including the words about the 'cup of salvation' — a striking connection to the cup of the new covenant He was about to institute. Paul quotes verse 10 in 2 Corinthians 4:13. The phrase 'cords of death' (v. 3) echoes Psalm 18:4-5 and 2 Samuel 22:5-6. The vow-paying in the courts of the LORD's house connects to the Temple worship that was central to Israelite thanksgiving.*

¹I love the LORD
because He hears my voice, my pleas for mercy.

²Because He turned His ear toward me,
I will call on Him as long as I live.

³The cords of death wrapped around me;
the straits of Sheol found me.
I found distress and grief.

⁴Then I called on the name of the LORD:
"Please, LORD, rescue my life!"

⁵The LORD is gracious and righteous;
our God shows compassion.

⁶The LORD watches over the vulnerable;
I was brought low, and He saved me.

⁷Return, my soul, to your rest,
for the LORD has dealt generously with you.

⁸For You rescued my life from death,
my eyes from tears,
my feet from stumbling.

⁹I will walk before the LORD
among the living.

¹⁰I believed, even when I said,
"I am severely afflicted."

¹¹I said in my alarm,
"Every person is a liar."

¹²What can I give back to the LORD
for all His gifts to me?

¹³I will lift the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the LORD.

¹⁴I will fulfill my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all His people.

¹⁵Costly in the eyes of the LORD
is the death of His faithful ones.

¹⁶Please, LORD — truly I am Your servant;
I am Your servant, the child of Your maidservant.
You have loosened my bonds.

¹⁷To You I will offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving
and call on the name of the LORD.

¹⁸I will fulfill my vows to the LORD
in the presence of all His people,

¹⁹in the courts of the house of the LORD,
in your midst, Jerusalem.
Praise the LORD!

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The syntax of the opening is slightly unusual — ahavti ('I loved/I love') stands without an explicit object. Most translations supply 'the LORD' as the object, which fits the context. The verb yishma ('He hears') is in the imperfect, suggesting ongoing action: the LORD hears — He is always hearing — and that is why the psalmist loves.
2. The phrase hittah ozno li ('He inclined His ear to me') is a vivid anthropomorphism — God bends down, tilts His ear, leans in to listen. The response is ve-yavmai eqra ('and in my days I will call') — for the rest of his life, the psalmist will continue to call on the LORD. The deliverance creates a lifetime of prayer.
3. The word chevlei is ambiguous between 'cords' and 'pangs' — some translations choose one, some the other. The rendering 'cords' is chosen here because it pairs with the image of being wrapped or encircled (afafuni). Sheol is the realm of the dead, not a place of punishment but a place of shadow, silence, and separation from the living.
4. The phrase uv-shem YHWH eqra ('and on the name of the LORD I called') introduces the prayer that saved his life. The prayer itself is terse and desperate: annah YHWH malletah nafshi ('please, LORD, deliver my life'). The word annah ('please, I beg you') is a particle of urgent entreaty. The verb malletah (Piel imperative of malat, 'to slip away, to escape, to deliver') asks God to cause his nefesh ('life, self, soul') to escape death's grip.

5. Three attributes are listed: *channun* ('gracious'), *tzaddiq* ('righteous'), and *merachem* ('compassionate, showing mercy'). The first echoes Exodus 34:6. The second affirms that God's rescue is not arbitrary but just. The third — *merachem*, from the root *racham* ('womb-compassion') — describes a tenderness that is visceral, like a mother's instinct toward her child.
6. The word *peta'im* ('simple ones, naive ones, the inexperienced') describes people who lack the resources or sophistication to protect themselves. The LORD is their *shomer* ('guardian, keeper'). The psalmist identifies with them: *dalloti* ('I was brought low, I was reduced') — from the root *dalal* ('to hang down, to be thin, to be depleted'). In that depleted state, *ve-li yehoshi'a* ('and He saved me').
7. The psalmist addresses his own *nefesh* ('soul, self, inner life'): *shuvi* ('return') to *menuchayikhi* ('your rest, your resting place'). The crisis had displaced his inner peace; now he commands himself to come back to rest. The reason: *ki YHWH gamal alayikhi* ('for the LORD has dealt bountifully upon you'). The verb *gamal* means 'to deal with, to repay, to bring to completion' — God has finished the work of rescue.
8. A threefold deliverance: *nafshi mi-mavet* ('my life from death'), *einai min dim'ah* ('my eyes from tears'), *ragli middechi* ('my feet from stumbling'). The whole person is saved — life, sight, and movement. The verb *chilatzta* ('You rescued, You pulled out') means to pull someone from a tight place, to extricate.
9. The verb *ethalekh* ('I will walk') in the *Hitpael* means 'to walk about, to conduct oneself, to live one's life.' The psalmist will live *lifnei YHWH* ('before the LORD, in the LORD's presence'). The phrase *be-artzot ha-chayyim* ('in the lands of the living') contrasts with *Sheol*, the land of the dead. The deliverance has returned him to the realm of life and worship.
10. The LXX splits the psalm here, making this the beginning of a new psalm (LXX Psalm 115). Paul's quotation in 2 Corinthians 4:13 follows the LXX reading. The Hebrew is genuinely ambiguous and has generated extensive scholarly discussion. The word *aniti* ('I was afflicted') from *anah* ('to be bowed down, afflicted') describes deep suffering.
11. The word *bechofzi* ('in my alarm, in my haste, in my panic') describes a moment of crisis-driven speech. The declaration *kol ha-adam kozev* ('every person is a liar') is an extreme statement born of desperation — when human help failed, the psalmist concluded that all human promises are empty. The psalm does not endorse this as a permanent theology but records it as an honest moment of despair. Paul quotes this in Romans 3:4.
12. The question *mah ashiv la-YHWH* ('what can I return to the LORD?') is not rhetorical despair but genuine gratitude searching for an adequate response. The word *tagmulohi* ('His benefits, His dealings, His gifts') from *gamal* describes the full weight of what God has done. The psalmist knows he cannot repay God but asks what fitting response he can offer.
13. The 'cup of salvation' has deep resonance in Jewish Passover liturgy — the four cups of the Seder each carry theological meaning. Jesus' institution of the cup at the Last Supper (Luke 22:20) would have occurred in the context of singing this very psalm. The verb *essa* ('I will lift, I will carry') is the gesture of offering and public display.
14. *Nedarai la-YHWH ashallem* ('my vows to the LORD I will pay') — the vows made during the crisis will now be fulfilled publicly. The word *negdah* ('in the presence of, before the face of') emphasizes that this is not private devotion but public testimony. The community witnesses the fulfillment, and the testimony becomes part of the communal memory of God's faithfulness.
15. The word *chasidav* ('His faithful ones') is the plural of *chasid*, derived from *chesed* ('faithful love'). A *chasid* is a person characterized by *chesed* — one who both receives and gives covenant loyalty. The rendering 'costly' rather than 'precious' captures the economic metaphor: God treats the death of His faithful as something He is reluctant to spend.
16. The double declaration *ani avdekha* ('I am Your servant') is emphatic — servanthood to God is not a burden but a privilege after deliverance. The phrase *ben amatekha* ('son of Your maidservant') means a servant born in the household, not purchased from outside — the psalmist belongs to God's household by birth and by choice. The verb *pittachta* ('You opened, You loosened') applied to *moserai* ('my bonds, my fetters') means God has set him free from the cords of death that bound him in verse 3.
17. The *zevach todah* ('sacrifice of thanksgiving') was a specific category of peace offering (*shelamim*) described in Leviticus 7:12-15. It included animal sacrifice accompanied by various breads and was eaten communally. The *todah* ('thanksgiving') is not just verbal gratitude but a concrete liturgical act involving food, community, and testimony.
18. This verse is identical to verse 14, forming a liturgical refrain. The repetition is not accidental but structural — it frames the central declarations of verses 15-17 with the commitment to public testimony. The vow-fulfillment brackets the psalm's deepest theological statements.
19. The location is specified: *chatzrot beit YHWH* ('the courts of the LORD's house') — the Temple precincts where public worship and sacrifice took place. The phrase *betokhekhi Yerushalayim* ('in your midst, Jerusalem') personalizes the city as a living entity addressed directly. The psalm ends with *Hallelujah* — the final word of praise that both closes this psalm and connects it to the *Hallel* sequence.

117

Summary: *Psalm 117 is the shortest psalm and the shortest chapter in the Bible — just two verses. It calls on all nations and all peoples to praise the LORD because His faithful love toward Israel is mighty and His faithfulness endures forever. Despite its brevity, the psalm makes a universalist claim that extends Israel's worship to the whole earth.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The psalm's brevity is itself remarkable — it says everything that needs to be said in seventeen Hebrew words. But the theological weight is enormous: the nations are summoned to praise Israel's God. This is not a call for the nations to become Israelites but a declaration that the LORD's faithful love (chesed) toward Israel is so powerful that even the nations should recognize and celebrate it. The logic is: God's covenant love is so great that its effects spill beyond Israel and become visible to the whole world. Paul quotes this psalm in Romans 15:11 as evidence that God always intended to include the Gentiles in His praise.*

Translation Friction: *The psalm's call for all nations to praise Israel's God raises the question of why the nations would celebrate God's chesed toward Israel specifically. One answer is that the nations benefit from Israel's blessing — the Abrahamic promise included 'in you all the families of the earth will be blessed' (Genesis 12:3). Another is that the nations, having witnessed God's faithfulness to Israel, recognize that such a God is worthy of universal worship. The psalm does not resolve this tension but holds both ideas together.*

Connections: *Paul quotes Psalm 117:1 in Romans 15:11 as part of his argument that the Hebrew Scriptures always anticipated Gentile inclusion in the worship of Israel's God. The psalm is part of the Egyptian Hallel (113-118) and sits at the exact center of the collection. The pairing of chesed and emet echoes Exodus 34:6 and appears throughout the Psalter. As the middle chapter of the Bible (by chapter count), it has attracted attention from those who see its universalist theme as the Bible's structural center.*

1Praise the LORD, all nations!

Exalt Him, all peoples!

2For His faithful love toward us is mighty,
and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever.
Praise the LORD!

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The distinction between goyim ('nations' as political entities) and ummim ('peoples' as ethnic or cultural groups) creates a merism — together they mean 'everyone, without exception.' Paul cites this verse in Romans 15:11 in a catena of quotations proving that the inclusion of Gentiles in God's praise was always part of the divine plan.
2. The verb gavar ('to be mighty, to prevail') is the same root as gibbor ('mighty warrior'). Applied to chesed, it means God's faithful love is not gentle sentiment but overpowering force — it conquers. The speaker says 'us' (aleinu), meaning Israel, but the audience is the nations — Israel testifies to the nations about what God's chesed has done.

118

Summary: *Psalm 118 is the climactic finale of the Egyptian Hallel (Psalms 113-118). It opens and closes with the refrain 'Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good — His faithful love endures forever.' Between these frames, a speaker (likely a king or leader) recounts being surrounded by enemies, pushed to the brink, and then rescued by the LORD. The psalm moves from personal testimony to a liturgical procession approaching the Temple gates, culminating in the famous declaration: 'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.' The psalm celebrates the reversal of human rejection by divine choice.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 118 is the most quoted psalm in the New Testament. 'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone' (v. 22) is applied to Jesus by every gospel writer and by Paul and Peter. 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD' (v. 26) is the crowd's acclamation at the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. 'This is the day the LORD has made' (v. 24) has become one of the most recognized sentences in the Bible. The psalm's theological center is the reversal pattern: what the powerful rejected, God chose. What nations surrounded, God broke through. What was pushed to falling, God upheld. The entire Hallel collection builds to this psalm — the Passover celebration culminates in the declaration that God's faithful love overturns every human verdict.*

Translation Friction: *The identity of the speaker is debated — is this a king returning from battle, a personified Israel, or a liturgical 'everyman'? The processional elements (gates, binding the sacrifice, the altar) suggest a specific Temple ceremony, but the language is general enough to be adopted by any worshiper. The 'stone the builders rejected' (v. 22) was originally a metaphor for Israel or its king, rejected by the powerful nations but chosen by God. The New Testament application to Jesus extends this beyond its original scope — which is theologically significant precisely because the pattern of divine reversal operates at multiple levels.*

Connections: *Jesus quotes verse 22 (the rejected stone) in Matthew 21:42, Mark 12:10, and Luke 20:17. Peter quotes it in Acts 4:11 and 1 Peter 2:7. Paul alludes to it in Ephesians 2:20. The crowd quotes verse 26 at the triumphal entry (Matthew 21:9, Mark 11:9, Luke 19:38, John 12:13). Jesus refers to verse 26 in Matthew 23:39 as a prophecy about Jerusalem's future recognition of Him. The Hallel was the last hymn sung at the Last Supper (Matthew 26:30) — Psalm 118 was likely the final psalm Jesus sang before Gethsemane.*

¹Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good,
for His faithful love endures forever.

²Let Israel say:
"His faithful love endures forever."

³Let the house of Aaron say:
"His faithful love endures forever."

⁴Let those who fear the LORD say:
"His faithful love endures forever."

⁵From the narrow place I called on the LORD;
the LORD answered me with wide-open space.

⁶The LORD is for me — I will not fear.
What can any human do to me?

⁷The LORD is for me, among my helpers;
I will look in triumph on those who hate me.

⁸It is better to take refuge in the LORD
than to trust in any human.

⁹It is better to take refuge in the LORD
than to trust in princes.

¹⁰All nations surrounded me,
but in the name of the LORD I cut them off.

¹¹They surrounded me — yes, surrounded me on every side,
but in the name of the LORD I cut them off.

¹²They swarmed around me like bees;
they blazed like a fire of thorns,
but in the name of the LORD I cut them off.

¹³I was pushed hard — pushed to falling,
but the LORD helped me.

¹⁴The LORD is my strength and my song;
He has become my salvation.

¹⁵Shouts of joy and salvation
fill the tents of the righteous:
"The right hand of the LORD acts with power!"

¹⁶The right hand of the LORD is raised high;
the right hand of the LORD acts with power!

¹⁷I will not die but live,
and I will declare the works of the LORD.

¹⁸The LORD disciplined me severely,
but He did not hand me over to death.

¹⁹Open the gates of righteousness for me;
I will enter through them and thank the LORD.

²⁰This is the gate of the LORD;
the righteous will enter through it.

²¹I thank You, for You answered me
and became my salvation.

²²The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone.

²³This is from the LORD;
it is marvelous in our eyes.

²⁴This is the day the LORD has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.

²⁵Please, LORD, save us!
Please, LORD, grant us success!

²⁶Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD.
We bless you from the house of the LORD.

²⁷The LORD is God, and He has given us light.
Bind the festival offering with branches

up to the horns of the altar.

²⁸You are my God, and I will thank You;
my God, I will exalt You.

²⁹Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good,
for His faithful love endures forever.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The opening formula *hodu la-YHWH ki tov ki le'olam chasdo* ('give thanks to the LORD for He is good, for His faithful love is forever') is shared with Psalms 106:1, 107:1, and 136:1. It functions as a liturgical refrain that frames the entire psalm (repeated in v. 29). The word *chesed* is rendered 'faithful love' — the covenant loyalty that does not expire.
2. The threefold call (Israel, house of Aaron, those who fear the LORD) mirrors Psalm 115:9-11. Each group is invited to affirm the refrain. Israel speaks first as the covenant nation.
3. The priests add their voice to the refrain. As those who minister closest to God's presence, their testimony carries liturgical authority.
4. The third group — *yir'ei YHWH* ('those who fear the LORD') — completes the threefold pattern. This phrase may include God-fearing non-Israelites, extending the scope of praise beyond ethnic boundaries.
5. The word *metzar* comes from the root *tzarar* ('to be narrow, to press, to bind'). It is related to *mitzrayim* ('Egypt'), and some scholars hear an etymological echo here: Egypt was the original 'narrow place' from which Israel cried out to God. The *merchav* ('broad place') is the space of freedom, movement, and possibility.
6. *YHWH li* ('the LORD is for me / the LORD is mine') is a statement of radical allegiance and confidence. The rhetorical question *mah ya'aseh li adam* ('what can a human do to me?') is quoted in Hebrews 13:6. The logic is not that humans are powerless but that their power is nothing compared to having the LORD on one's side.
7. *YHWH li be-ozrai* ('the LORD is for me among those who help me') — God is not merely one helper among many but the decisive helper whose presence changes everything. The phrase *er'eh vesone'ai* ('I will look upon those who hate me') implies seeing their defeat, though the word 'defeat' is not stated — the looking itself is an act of vindication.
8. The word *lachsot* ('to take refuge, to seek shelter') describes the act of running to God for protection. The contrast with *bittoach ba-adam* ('trusting in humans') is not cynicism about people but clarity about where ultimate security lies.
9. The parallel intensifies: if trusting humans generally is inferior to trusting God, trusting *nedivim* ('princes, nobles, powerful leaders') is equally inferior. Even the most powerful human allies cannot provide what the LORD provides.
10. *Kol goyim sevavuni* ('all nations encircled me') — the military imagery describes being completely surrounded. The response is *beshem YHWH ki amilam* ('in the name of the LORD, surely I cut them off'). The verb *mul* (Hiphil: *amil*) means 'to cut off, to circumcise, to remove.' The power to break the siege comes not from military strength but from the name — the authority and presence — of the LORD.
11. The doubled *savvuni gam sevavuni* ('they encircled me, they even encircled me') intensifies the sense of siege. The refrain *beshem YHWH ki amilam* remains unchanged — the response does not escalate with the threat because the LORD's name is already sufficient.
12. Two similes describe the enemies: *kidevorim* ('like bees') — swarming, stinging, relentless — and *ke-esh qotzim* ('like fire of thorns') — fierce and fast but quickly extinguished. Thorn fires burn hot but burn out almost immediately. The enemies are dangerous but unsustainable. The refrain closes the third cycle: in the name of the LORD, they are cut off.
13. *Dachoh dechitani linpol* ('pushing you pushed me to fall') — the emphatic infinitive absolute (*dachoh*) intensifies the verb: the push was severe, determined, intended to destroy. The subject 'you' addresses the enemy directly. The counter-statement is simple: *va-YHWH azarani* ('but the LORD helped me'). The contrast between the elaborate description of the attack and the brief statement of rescue dramatizes the sufficiency of divine help.
14. The phrase *ozzi ve-zimrat Yah* is identical to Exodus 15:2a and Isaiah 12:2. The intertextual connection is deliberate — every subsequent rescue by the LORD is a re-enactment of the Exodus. The word *zimrat* can mean 'song' or 'strength/protection' (from a separate root *zamar* meaning 'to be strong'), and the ambiguity may be intentional.
15. *Qol rinnah vishu'ah* ('the sound of joyful shouting and salvation') fills *be-oholei tzaddiqim* ('the tents of the righteous'). The 'tents' may refer to actual dwellings, to festival booths, or to the encampment metaphor for God's people. The quotation within the psalm — *yemin YHWH osah chayil* ('the right hand of the LORD does valiantly') — is what the righteous are shouting. The *yemin* ('right hand') is the hand of power, of oath-taking, of action.
16. The triple mention of *yemin YHWH* ('the right hand of the LORD') across verses 15-16 creates a drumbeat of celebration. The verb *romemah* ('is raised high, is exalted') pictures God's hand lifted in victory — the image of a warrior who has won the fight and raises his weapon-hand in triumph.

- 17.** The phrase *lo amut ki echyeh* has become one of the most quoted lines in the Psalms. The *ki* ('but, rather') is adversative, creating a sharp contrast: not death but life. The verb *sapper* ('to recount, to tell, to declare') is the verb of testimony — the survivor becomes a witness.
- 18.** *Yassor yisserani Yah* ('disciplining the LORD disciplined me') — the emphatic infinitive absolute acknowledges that the suffering was real and severe, and that it came from the LORD. This is not enemy action alone but divine discipline. Yet *ve-la-mavet lo netanani* ('but to death He did not give me') — the discipline had a limit. God chastened but did not destroy. The distinction between discipline and destruction is crucial: discipline serves a purpose; destruction ends all purpose.
- 19.** The scene shifts to the Temple: *pitchu li sha'arei tzedeq* ('open for me the gates of righteousness'). The *sha'arei tzedeq* ('gates of righteousness') are the Temple gates through which the righteous enter to worship. The psalmist, having survived the crisis, now approaches the place of thanksgiving. The verb *odeh* ('I will give thanks') indicates that the purpose of entering is public testimony.
- 20.** A voice (perhaps a gatekeeper or Levite) responds: *zeh ha-sha'ar la-YHWH* ('this is the gate belonging to the LORD') — the gate is identified as divine property. The condition of entry: *tzaddiqim yavo'u vo* ('the righteous will enter through it'). The exchange suggests a liturgical dialogue between the one approaching and those guarding the entrance.
- 21.** Now inside the gates, the psalmist addresses God directly: *odekha ki anitani* ('I thank You for You answered me'). The verb *anah* ('to answer') confirms that the prayer of distress (v. 5) was heard and responded to. The phrase *vattehi li lishu'ah* ('and You became my salvation') repeats verse 14b, creating a structural echo.
- 22.** The *rosh pinnah* ('head of the corner') is the most important stone in a building — it sets the angle, determines the alignment, and bears the weight of two walls. Some scholars identify it as the capstone rather than the foundation stone, but in either case it is the stone that holds the structure together. Jesus applies this verse to Himself in Matthew 21:42, Mark 12:10, and Luke 20:17. Peter uses it in Acts 4:11 and 1 Peter 2:7.
- 23.** *Me-et YHWH hayetah zot* ('from the LORD this has come about') — the reversal was not human cleverness but divine action. The word *nifla't* ('wonderful, marvelous') comes from the root *pala* ('to be extraordinary, beyond human capacity'). The reversal exceeds what anyone could have planned or expected — it can only be explained as God's work.
- 24.** *Zeh ha-yom asah YHWH* ('this is the day the LORD has made') — the 'day' is not a generic day but this specific day of reversal and vindication. The LORD 'made' it in the sense that He brought it about, orchestrated it, caused it to happen. The response is *nagilah venismechah vo* ('let us exult and rejoice in it') — corporate celebration of what God has done.
- 25.** The double *anna YHWH* ('please, LORD') is urgent entreaty. The verbs *hoshi'ah na* ('save, please!') and *hatzlichah na* ('grant success, please!') form the Hebrew phrase from which 'Hosanna' derives. *Hoshi'ah na* became Hosanna in Greek transliteration — the crowd's cry at Jesus' triumphal entry (Matthew 21:9) is a direct quotation of this verse.
- 26.** In the original liturgical setting, this may have been spoken by the priests to a king or pilgrim arriving at the Temple. In its New Testament application, the phrase takes on messianic significance — Jesus is identified as 'the one who comes' in God's name, and His entry into Jerusalem is framed as a fulfillment of this psalm.
- 27.** *El YHWH vayyaer lanu* ('the LORD is God, and He has shone upon us') — the verb *he'ir* ('to give light, to shine') may refer to the priestly blessing of Numbers 6:25 ('the LORD make His face shine upon you'). The second instruction — *isru chag ba-avotim ad qarnot ha-mizbeach* ('bind the festival offering with cords/branches up to the horns of the altar') — describes the preparation of the sacrifice. The *avotim* can mean 'cords' or 'thick branches.' The *qarnot ha-mizbeach* ('horns of the altar') were the projecting corners of the sacrificial altar.
- 28.** *Eli attah ve-odekka* ('You are my God and I will thank You') — the personal declaration. The shift from communal praise to individual address is intimate: *attah* ('You') is direct, face-to-face language. The psalmist claims God personally — not merely 'our God' but 'my God' — and pledges both thanksgiving (*odekka*) and exaltation (*aromemekka*).
- 29.** The psalm closes with the same refrain that opened it (v. 1): *hodu la-YHWH ki tov ki le'olam chasdo*. The frame is complete. Everything between the two refrains — the distress, the siege, the rescue, the rejected stone, the opened gates, the festival procession — is contained within and explained by the steadfast faithful love of the LORD.

119

Summary: *Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible: 176 verses organized as an alphabetic acrostic of 22 stanzas, one for every letter of the Hebrew alphabet from aleph to tav. Each stanza contains exactly eight verses, and every verse within a stanza begins with that stanza's Hebrew letter. The psalm is a sustained meditation on God's revealed word, and it cycles through eight Hebrew terms for divine revelation: torah (instruction), edut/edot (testimony/testimonies), piqqudim (precepts), chuqqim (statutes), mitsvot (commandments), mishpatim (judgments/ordinances), davar/devarim (word/words), and imrah (saying/promise). Nearly every verse contains at least one of these eight terms. The psalmist is not writing systematic theology but praying through the alphabet — the entire range of human speech — and filling every letter with devotion to God's instruction.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The acrostic structure is not decorative but theological. By writing one stanza for every letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the psalmist says: there is no letter, no sound, no corner of language that cannot be turned toward God's instruction. The alphabet is the raw material of all speech, and the psalmist consecrates every piece of it. The eight rotating torah-words function like a musical theme with variations — each word emphasizes a different facet of revelation (instruction, testimony, precept, statute, command, judgment, word, promise), and their constant recombination across 176 verses creates a kaleidoscopic portrait of what it means to live under God's spoken will. The psalm is also deeply personal: the psalmist weeps, suffers, is persecuted by the arrogant, lies awake at night, and clings to God's word as the one stable reality in a hostile world. This is not a cold catalog of legal terms but an intimate journal of someone who has staked everything on the reliability of what God has said.*

Translation Friction: *Modern readers sometimes experience Psalm 119 as repetitive, but the repetition is the point. This is a meditation manual — it is designed to be prayed slowly, one stanza at a time, the way a musician practices scales. The eight torah-words are not synonyms but overlapping perspectives on the same reality: torah emphasizes instruction and guidance, edut emphasizes witness and testimony, piqudim emphasizes specific charges or appointments, chuqqim emphasizes engraved or permanent decrees, mitsvot emphasizes direct commands, mishpatim emphasizes judicial decisions and case law, davar emphasizes the spoken or communicated word, and imrah emphasizes the personal promise or saying. The psalmist's constant petition for understanding (binah, sekhel, da'at) suggests that knowing God's word is not automatic — it requires ongoing illumination.*

Connections: *Psalm 119 is the climax of the Torah-psalms that begin with Psalm 1 ('Blessed is the one whose delight is in the instruction of the LORD') and Psalm 19 ('The instruction of the LORD is complete, restoring the soul'). It expands the themes of those shorter psalms into a full alphabetic meditation. The eight torah-words echo Deuteronomy's vocabulary for covenant obligation (especially Deuteronomy 4-6). The psalmist's suffering and persecution connect to the lament traditions found throughout the Psalter. The opening beatitude ('Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the instruction of the LORD') mirrors Psalm 1:1 and frames the entire psalm as a wisdom text.*

¹How blessed are those whose way is blameless,
who walk in the instruction of the LORD.

²How blessed are those who guard his testimonies,
who seek him with their whole heart.

³Indeed they do no wrong;
they walk in his ways.

⁴You yourself have commanded your precepts
to be kept with care.

⁵If only my ways were firmly set
to keep your statutes!

⁶Then I would not be put to shame
when I look at all your commandments.

⁷I will give you thanks with an upright heart
as I learn your righteous judgments.

⁸I will keep your statutes —
do not utterly forsake me.

- ⁹How can a young person keep his path pure?
By guarding it according to your word.
- ¹⁰With my whole heart I seek you;
do not let me stray from your commandments.
- ¹¹In my heart I have treasured your promise,
so that I will not sin against you.
- ¹²Blessed are you, O LORD;
teach me your statutes.
- ¹³With my lips I recount
all the judgments of your mouth.
- ¹⁴In the way of your testimonies I rejoice
as over all wealth.
- ¹⁵On your precepts I will meditate,
and I will fix my gaze on your paths.
- ¹⁶In your statutes I take delight;
I will not forget your word.
- ¹⁷Deal generously with your servant, that I may live
and keep your word.
- ¹⁸Uncover my eyes, that I may see
wondrous things from your instruction.
- ¹⁹I am a stranger in the land;
do not hide your commandments from me.
- ²⁰My soul is crushed with longing
for your judgments at all times.
- ²¹You rebuke the arrogant — they are cursed,
those who stray from your commandments.
- ²²Roll away from me scorn and contempt,
for I have guarded your testimonies.
- ²³Even when rulers sit and conspire against me,
your servant meditates on your statutes.
- ²⁴Yes, your testimonies are my delight,
my counselors.
- ²⁵My soul clings to the dust;
revive me according to your word.

²⁶I told you my ways and you answered me;
teach me your statutes.

²⁷Make me understand the way of your precepts,
and I will meditate on your wonders.

²⁸My soul melts with grief;
raise me up according to your word.

²⁹Remove from me the way of falsehood,
and graciously grant me your instruction.

³⁰I have chosen the way of faithfulness;
your judgments I have set before me.

³¹I cling to your testimonies, O LORD;
do not put me to shame.

³²I will run the way of your commandments,
for you enlarge my heart.

³³Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes,
and I will keep it to the end.

³⁴Give me understanding, and I will guard your instruction
and keep it with my whole heart.

³⁵Lead me in the path of your commandments,
for in it I delight.

³⁶Turn my heart toward your testimonies
and not toward selfish gain.

³⁷Turn my eyes away from looking at worthless things;
revive me in your way.

³⁸Confirm your promise to your servant,
which leads to fearing you.

³⁹Take away the disgrace I dread,
for your judgments are good.

⁴⁰See how I long for your precepts!
Revive me in your righteousness.

⁴¹Let your faithful love come to me, O LORD —
your salvation, according to your promise.

⁴²Then I will have an answer for those who taunt me,
for I trust in your word.

⁴³Do not snatch the word of truth from my mouth entirely,
for I put my hope in your judgments.

⁴⁴I will keep your instruction continually,
forever and ever.

⁴⁵I will walk in a wide open place,
for I have sought your precepts.

⁴⁶I will speak of your testimonies before kings
and will not be ashamed.

⁴⁷I will delight in your commandments,
which I love.

⁴⁸I will lift my hands toward your commandments, which I love,
and I will meditate on your statutes.

⁴⁹Remember your word to your servant,
in which you have given me hope.

⁵⁰This is my comfort in my suffering:
that your promise has revived me.

⁵¹The arrogant mock me bitterly,
but I do not turn from your instruction.

⁵²I remember your judgments from of old, O LORD,
and I find comfort.

⁵³Burning indignation seizes me
because of the wicked who abandon your instruction.

⁵⁴Your statutes have been my songs
in the house of my sojourning.

⁵⁵I remember your name in the night, O LORD,
and I keep your instruction.

⁵⁶This has been my way of life:
that I have guarded your precepts.

⁵⁷The LORD is my portion;
I have promised to keep your words.

⁵⁸I seek your favor with my whole heart;
be gracious to me according to your promise.

⁵⁹I considered my ways
and turned my feet back to your testimonies.

⁶⁰I hurried and did not delay
to keep your commandments.

⁶¹The ropes of the wicked have ensnared me,
but I have not forgotten your instruction.

⁶²At midnight I rise to give you thanks
for your righteous judgments.

⁶³I am a companion of all who fear you,
of those who keep your precepts.

⁶⁴The earth is full of your faithful love, O LORD;
teach me your statutes.

⁶⁵You have dealt well with your servant,
O LORD, according to your word.

⁶⁶Teach me good judgment and knowledge,
for I trust in your commandments.

⁶⁷Before I was humbled I went astray,
but now I keep your promise.

⁶⁸You are good and you do good;
teach me your statutes.

⁶⁹The arrogant smear me with lies,
but I guard your precepts with my whole heart.

⁷⁰Their heart is thick like fat,
but I delight in your instruction.

⁷¹It was good for me that I was humbled,
so that I might learn your statutes.

⁷²The instruction from your mouth is better to me
than thousands of gold and silver pieces.

⁷³Your hands made me and formed me;
give me understanding, that I may learn your commandments.

⁷⁴Those who fear you see me and rejoice,
for I have put my hope in your word.

⁷⁵I know, O LORD, that your judgments are righteous
and that in faithfulness you humbled me.

⁷⁶Let your faithful love be my comfort,
according to your promise to your servant.

⁷⁷Let your compassion come to me, that I may live,
for your instruction is my delight.

⁷⁸Let the arrogant be put to shame, for they wrong me with lies;
but I — I will meditate on your precepts.

⁷⁹Let those who fear you turn to me,
those who know your testimonies.

⁸⁰Let my heart be blameless in your statutes,
so that I will not be put to shame.

⁸¹My soul wastes away for your salvation;
I put my hope in your word.

⁸²My eyes fail with watching for your promise,
saying, 'When will you comfort me?'

⁸³Though I have become like a wineskin in smoke,
I do not forget your statutes.

⁸⁴How many days must your servant endure?
When will you execute judgment on my pursuers?

⁸⁵The arrogant have dug pits for me —
they who do not follow your instruction.

⁸⁶All your commandments are faithful;
they persecute me with lies — help me!

⁸⁷They nearly destroyed me on earth,
but I did not abandon your precepts.

⁸⁸According to your faithful love, revive me,
and I will keep the testimony of your mouth.

⁸⁹Forever, O LORD,
your word stands firm in heaven.

⁹⁰Your faithfulness endures through all generations;
you established the earth, and it stands.

⁹¹By your judgments they stand today,
for all things are your servants.

⁹²If your instruction had not been my delight,
I would have perished in my suffering.

⁹³I will never forget your precepts,
for by them you have given me life.

⁹⁴I am yours — save me,
for I have sought your precepts.

⁹⁵The wicked lie in wait to destroy me,
but I consider your testimonies.

⁹⁶I have seen a limit to all perfection,
but your commandment is boundlessly wide.

⁹⁷How I love your instruction!
It is my meditation all day long.

⁹⁸Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies,
for they are always with me.

⁹⁹I have more insight than all my teachers,
for your testimonies are my meditation.

¹⁰⁰I understand more than the elders,
for I guard your precepts.

¹⁰¹I hold back my feet from every evil path,
in order to keep your word.

¹⁰²I have not turned from your judgments,
for you yourself have taught me.

¹⁰³How sweet is your promise to my taste —
sweeter than honey to my mouth!

¹⁰⁴From your precepts I gain understanding;
therefore I hate every false path.

¹⁰⁵Your word is a lamp for my feet
and a light for my path.

¹⁰⁶I have sworn an oath and confirmed it:
to keep your righteous judgments.

¹⁰⁷I am deeply afflicted;
O LORD, revive me according to your word.

¹⁰⁸Accept the freewill offerings of my mouth, O LORD,
and teach me your judgments.

¹⁰⁹My life is constantly in my hands,
yet I do not forget your instruction.

¹¹⁰The wicked set a trap for me,
but I do not stray from your precepts.

¹¹¹Your testimonies are my inheritance forever,
for they are the joy of my heart.

¹¹²I incline my heart to perform your statutes
forever, to the very end.

¹¹³I hate the double-minded,
but your instruction I love.

¹¹⁴You are my shelter and my shield;
I put my hope in your word.

¹¹⁵Depart from me, you evildoers,
for I will guard the commandments of my God.

¹¹⁶Sustain me according to your promise, that I may live,
and do not let me be ashamed of my hope.

¹¹⁷Support me, and I will be saved;
I will gaze on your statutes continually.

¹¹⁸You reject all who stray from your statutes,
for their cunning is a lie.

¹¹⁹You remove all the wicked of the earth like dross;
therefore I love your testimonies.

¹²⁰My flesh shudders in awe of you,
and I stand in fear of your judgments.

¹²¹I have done what is just and right;
do not abandon me to my oppressors.

¹²²Be your servant's guarantor for good;
do not let the arrogant oppress me.

¹²³My eyes fail with watching for your salvation
and for your righteous promise.

¹²⁴Deal with your servant according to your faithful love,
and teach me your statutes.

¹²⁵I am your servant; give me understanding,
that I may know your testimonies.

¹²⁶It is time for the LORD to act,
for they have broken your instruction.

¹²⁷Therefore I love your commandments
more than gold, more than fine gold.

¹²⁸Therefore I consider all your precepts — every one of them — right,
and I hate every false path.

¹²⁹Your testimonies are wonderful;
therefore my soul guards them.

¹³⁰The unfolding of your words gives light;
it gives understanding to the simple.

¹³¹I open my mouth and pant,
for I long for your commandments.

¹³²Turn to me and be gracious to me,
as is your way with those who love your name.

¹³³Steady my steps by your promise,
and let no iniquity rule over me.

¹³⁴Ransom me from human oppression,
and I will keep your precepts.

¹³⁵Make your face shine upon your servant,
and teach me your statutes.

¹³⁶Streams of water flow from my eyes
because they do not keep your instruction.

¹³⁷You are righteous, O LORD,
and your judgments are upright.

¹³⁸You have commanded your testimonies in righteousness
and in great faithfulness.

¹³⁹My zeal consumes me,
because my enemies have forgotten your words.

¹⁴⁰Your promise is thoroughly refined,
and your servant loves it.

¹⁴¹I am small and despised,
but I do not forget your precepts.

¹⁴²Your righteousness is righteousness forever,
and your instruction is truth.

¹⁴³Trouble and distress have found me,
but your commandments are my delight.

¹⁴⁴Your testimonies are righteous forever;
give me understanding, and I will live.

¹⁴⁵I cry out with my whole heart — answer me, O LORD!
I will guard your statutes.

¹⁴⁶I call to you — save me,
and I will keep your testimonies.

¹⁴⁷I rise before dawn and cry for help;
I put my hope in your word.

¹⁴⁸My eyes are open before the night watches,
that I may meditate on your promise.

¹⁴⁹Hear my voice according to your faithful love;
O LORD, revive me according to your judgment.

¹⁵⁰Those who pursue evil schemes draw near;
they are far from your instruction.

¹⁵¹You are near, O LORD,
and all your commandments are truth.

¹⁵²Long ago I learned from your testimonies
that you established them forever.

¹⁵³See my suffering and rescue me,
for I have not forgotten your instruction.

¹⁵⁴Plead my case and redeem me;
revive me according to your promise.

¹⁵⁵Salvation is far from the wicked,
for they do not seek your statutes.

¹⁵⁶Your mercies are great, O LORD;
revive me according to your judgments.

¹⁵⁷My persecutors and enemies are many,
but I do not turn from your testimonies.

¹⁵⁸I look at the faithless and feel disgust,
because they do not keep your promise.

¹⁵⁹See how I love your precepts!
O LORD, revive me according to your faithful love.

¹⁶⁰The sum of your word is truth,
and every one of your righteous judgments endures forever.

¹⁶¹Rulers persecute me without cause,
but my heart stands in awe of your word.

¹⁶²I rejoice over your promise
like one who finds great treasure.

¹⁶³I hate and despise falsehood,
but your instruction I love.

¹⁶⁴Seven times a day I praise you
for your righteous judgments.

¹⁶⁵Great peace belongs to those who love your instruction,
and nothing causes them to stumble.

¹⁶⁶I hope for your salvation, O LORD,
and I do your commandments.

¹⁶⁷My soul keeps your testimonies,
and I love them deeply.

¹⁶⁸I keep your precepts and your testimonies,
for all my ways are before you.

¹⁶⁹Let my cry come before you, O LORD;
give me understanding according to your word.

¹⁷⁰Let my plea come before you;
deliver me according to your promise.

¹⁷¹My lips will pour out praise,
for you teach me your statutes.

¹⁷²My tongue will sing of your promise,
for all your commandments are righteous.

¹⁷³Let your hand be ready to help me,
for I have chosen your precepts.

¹⁷⁴I long for your salvation, O LORD,
and your instruction is my delight.

¹⁷⁵Let my soul live, and it will praise you,
and let your judgments help me.

¹⁷⁶I have wandered like a lost sheep;
seek your servant,
for I have not forgotten your commandments.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Aleph stanza (vv. 1-8). Every verse in this stanza begins with the Hebrew letter aleph, the first letter of the alphabet. The psalmist begins at the beginning — with the foundational declaration that blessing flows from walking in God's instruction. The word *ashrei* is a plural construct ('blessings of') functioning as an exclamation — it cannot be reduced to a single English word. 'Happy' is too shallow; 'blessed' risks sounding passive. 'How blessed' preserves the exclamatory force.

2. The verb *natsar* ('to guard, to keep watch over, to preserve') implies active vigilance — God's testimonies (*edotav*) are something to be watched over and protected, not merely obeyed. The word *edot* ('testimonies') comes from the root *ud* ('to witness, to testify') and refers to God's declarations that bear witness to his character and will. Seeking (*darash*) with the whole heart (*bekhol lev*) means undivided pursuit.
3. The word *avlah* ('injustice, wrong, perversity') describes moral crookedness — the opposite of the blameless (*tamim*) way described in verse 1. The emphasis is not that these people never fail but that wrongdoing is not their pattern or trajectory. Their habitual path (*derekh*) is God's path.
4. The pronoun *attah* ('you') is emphatic — you yourself, God, are the one who issued these charges. The word *piqqudim* ('precepts') from the root *paqad* ('to attend to, to charge, to appoint') refers to specific charges or instructions that God has assigned. The adverb *me'od* ('very, exceedingly, diligently') intensifies the command: these are not casual suggestions but charges demanding careful attention.
5. *Achalai* ('if only, would that') expresses intense longing — the psalmist recognizes a gap between the blessedness described in verses 1-3 and his own reality. The verb *yakonu* ('were established, were firmly set') from *kun* means to be fixed, stable, prepared. The psalmist's ways (*derakhay*) are not yet firmly directed toward God's *chuqqim* ('statutes'). This is the psalm's first confession of inadequacy — the meditation begins not with self-congratulation but with desire.
6. The verb *bosh* ('to be ashamed, to be put to shame') describes the experience of being exposed as inadequate — the psalmist knows that looking honestly at God's *mitsvot* ('commandments') reveals how far short he falls. Only if his ways were firmly set (v. 5) could he face all of God's commandments without embarrassment.
7. The phrase *yosher levav* ('uprightness of heart') describes internal integrity — a heart that is straight and undivided. The verb *lamad* ('to learn') is significant: the psalmist is still learning, still in process. The word *mishpetei* ('judgments of') from *shaphat* ('to judge') refers to God's judicial decisions and case rulings — the specific applications of divine justice to real situations.
8. The stanza ends with a pledge and a plea. The psalmist commits to keeping God's statutes (*et chuqqekha eshmo*), but immediately adds a prayer: *al ta'azveni ad me'od* ('do not abandon me exceedingly/utterly'). The juxtaposition is revealing — the psalmist knows that his keeping depends on God's not leaving. Obedience is not a solo achievement but a response to divine presence.
9. Bet stanza (vv. 9-16). Every verse begins with the Hebrew letter bet, the second letter of the alphabet. The stanza opens with a practical question: *bammeh yezakkeh na'ar et orcho* ('by what means can a young person purify his way')? The verb *zakhah* ('to be pure, to be clean') and the noun *na'ar* ('young man, youth') together ask how a person at the beginning of life can navigate a straight course. The answer is the *davar* — God's word.
10. The verb *darash* ('to seek, to inquire, to pursue') describes active, intentional pursuit — not passive waiting but going after God. The plea *al tashgeni* ('do not let me stray') uses the Hiphil of *shagah* ('to wander, to err'), asking God to prevent the wandering that the psalmist knows he is capable of.
11. The verb *tsaphan* ('to hide, to treasure, to store up') means more than casual memorization — it describes something precious concealed for safekeeping. The word *imratekha* ('your saying/promise') from the root *amar* ('to say') refers to God's personal utterance, his spoken promise. This is the eighth and final torah-word to appear in the psalm.
12. *Barukh attah YHWH* ('blessed are you, O LORD') is the standard Jewish blessing formula that opens virtually every Hebrew prayer to this day. Here it transitions into petition: *lammedeni chuqqekha* ('teach me your statutes'). The verb *lamad* in the Piel ('to teach') asks God to be the instructor.
13. The verb *sippar* ('to recount, to declare, to tell') describes public recitation — the psalmist does not keep God's judgments to himself but speaks them aloud. The phrase *mishpetei fikha* ('judgments of your mouth') personalizes the source: these judgments come from God's own mouth.
14. The verb *sas* ('to rejoice, to exult') expresses delight — the psalmist finds joy in the path marked out by God's testimonies. The comparison *ke'al kol hon* ('as over all wealth') is striking: the psalmist's pleasure in God's testimonies equals or exceeds what others feel about riches.
15. The verb *siach* ('to meditate, to muse, to ponder, to talk to oneself') describes active mental engagement — not passive reading but turning something over in the mind. The verb *nabat* ('to look at, to gaze upon') in the Hiphil (*abbittah*) means to fix one's attention deliberately. Both verbs describe focused, sustained attention.
16. The verb *sha'a* in the Hitpael (*eshtasha*) describes luxuriant enjoyment — this is not dutiful compliance but genuine pleasure. The pledge *lo eshach devarekha* ('I will not forget your word') closes the stanza with a commitment to memory.
17. Gimel stanza (vv. 17-24). Every verse begins with the Hebrew letter gimel. The stanza opens with a petition: *gemol al avdekha* ('deal bountifully with your servant'). The verb *gamal* ('to deal with, to reward, to ripen') asks God to act generously. The purpose clause *echeyeh* ('that I may live') reveals that the psalmist's very survival depends on God's generous dealing.
18. The word *nifla'ot* (Niphal participle of *pala*, 'to be wonderful') refers to things that exceed normal understanding — marvels, wonders. These wonders are described as coming *mittorathekha* ('from your instruction'), suggesting that the torah contains layers of meaning revealed progressively as God opens the reader's eyes.
19. The word *ger* ('stranger, sojourner, resident alien') describes someone living in a land that is not their own, without the rights or security of a native. The psalmist's self-identification as a *ger* suggests that this world is not home — he is passing through and needs God's commandments as a guide for navigation in foreign territory.
20. The verb *garas* ('to crush, to break, to grind') describes physical grinding or crushing — the psalmist's soul (*nephesh*) is being ground to pieces by the intensity of its longing (*ta'avah*) for God's judgments. This is not mild interest but consuming desire. The phrase *bekhol et* ('at all times') means this longing never relents.

21. The verb *ga'ar* ('to rebuke, to blast, to threaten') describes God's forceful reprimand. The *zedim* ('arrogant, presumptuous, proud') are a recurring enemy throughout this psalm — those who willfully disregard God's commands. They are *arurim* ('cursed') — the opposite of the *ashrei* ('blessed') in verse 1.
22. The verb *galal* ('to roll') in the imperative (*gal*) pictures shame as a heavy stone that the psalmist wants God to roll off of him. The words *cherpah* ('reproach, scorn') and *buz* ('contempt') suggest that the psalmist is being mocked for his devotion to God's testimonies.
23. The *sarim* ('rulers, princes, officials') who conspire against the psalmist represent the highest level of opposition — this is not casual mockery but organized, powerful hostility. Against this political threat, the psalmist's response is meditation (*yasiach*) on God's statutes — quiet, sustained attention to divine truth in the face of human power.
24. The word *sha'ashu'ai* ('my delights') from *sha'a* describes luxuriant, overflowing pleasure. The phrase *anshei atsati* ('men of my counsel') personifies the testimonies as trusted advisors — where rulers plot against the psalmist (v. 23), God's testimonies serve as his inner circle of counsel.
25. Dalet stanza (vv. 25-32). Every verse begins with the Hebrew letter dalet. This stanza is marked by suffering and urgent petition — the psalmist is in the dust, weeping, melting with grief, and begging God for revival.
26. The verb *sippar* ('to recount, to tell') here describes the psalmist opening his life to God — *derakhay sippiarti* ('my ways I recounted'). This is confession: laying out one's path before God. And God answered (*vatta'aneni*). Now the psalmist asks for the next step: *lammedeni chuqqekha*. The sequence is important: confession, divine response, request for further instruction.
27. The verb *havineni* ('make me understand') from *bin* ('to discern') in the Hiphil is a plea for insight — not just knowledge but comprehension of how the precepts connect and apply. Understanding the precepts opens the door to seeing the wonders (*nifle'otekha*) embedded in them.
28. The verb *dalaf* ('to drip, to weep, to dissolve') describes the soul literally dissolving — *dalefah nafshi mittugah* ('my soul drips/melts from sorrow'). The image is of a person so grief-stricken that they are liquefying. The petition *qayyemeni* ('raise me up, establish me') asks God to give back the solidity that grief has dissolved.
29. The *derekh sheqer* ('way of falsehood') is the opposite of the *derekh emunah* ('way of faithfulness') in verse 30. The psalmist asks God to remove it — *haser* ('take away') — suggesting that the pull toward falsehood cannot be resisted by willpower alone. The petition *vetoratkha chonneni* ('and your instruction graciously grant me') uses *chanan* ('to be gracious') — the granting of torah is an act of grace.
30. The *derekh emunah* ('way of faithfulness') is the psalmist's chosen path — *bacharti* ('I have chosen') is a deliberate, conscious decision. The word *emunah* means faithfulness, reliability, steadfastness. The verb *shivviti* ('I have set, I have placed') means the psalmist has positioned God's judgments directly in front of himself as a constant reference point.
31. The verb *davaq* ('to cling') reappears from verse 25, but now the clinging has shifted: where the soul clung to dust (despair), the psalmist now clings to God's testimonies. The petition *al tevisheni* ('do not put me to shame') echoes verse 6 — shame is the constant fear of one who has staked everything on God's faithfulness.
32. The image of an enlarged heart (*lev rachav*) is the opposite of the narrow, constricted heart of anxiety and fear. When the heart is wide, it can contain more understanding, more desire, more joy, more obedience. The running is the result of the enlarging, not its cause.
33. He stanza (vv. 33-40). Every verse begins with the Hebrew letter he. This stanza is dominated by petitions — the psalmist asks God to teach, give understanding, lead, turn the heart, turn the eyes, confirm, and take away. The verb *horeni* ('teach me') from *arah* (the same root as torah) asks God to be the one who points the way. The word *eqev* ('end, consequence') suggests perseverance to the finish.
34. Again the verb *havineni* ('give me understanding') — the Hiphil imperative of *bin*. Understanding is not self-generated but received from God, and when received, it produces wholehearted obedience.
35. The verb *hadrikheni* ('lead me, cause me to tread') from *darakh* in the Hiphil asks God to actively guide the psalmist's steps. The word *nativ* ('path, pathway') describes a narrow, well-worn trail. The motivation is delight: *ki vo chafatsti* ('for in it I take pleasure').
36. The verb *natah* ('to stretch out, to incline, to turn') in the imperative asks God to tilt the psalmist's heart in the right direction. The heart can be inclined toward God's testimonies or toward *batsa* ('unjust gain, selfish profit, greed'). The psalmist does not trust his own heart's direction and asks God to set its angle.
37. The verb *ha'aver* ('cause to pass, turn away') asks God to redirect the psalmist's gaze. The word *shav* ('emptiness, vanity, worthlessness') describes things that have no substance — distractions that pull the eyes away from what matters. The petition *chayyeni* ('revive me') returns, now linked to *bidrekhekha* ('in your way').
38. The verb *haqem* ('establish, confirm') asks God to make his promise (*imrah*) firm in the psalmist's experience. The phrase *asher leyir'atekha* ('which leads to your fear') connects the confirmed promise to the fear of the LORD — when God keeps his word, the natural response is reverent awe.
39. The verb *ha'aver* ('take away') reappears from verse 37. The verb *yagor* ('to fear, to dread') reveals anxiety about being publicly shamed. The ground of his appeal is that God's judgments are *tovim* ('good') — if God's rulings are good, then those who follow them should not be disgraced.
40. The interjection *hinneh* ('see! behold!') draws God's attention to the psalmist's longing. The verb *ta'av* ('to long for, to desire') describes deep yearning for God's precepts. The petition *chayyeni* ('revive me') now rests on *betsidqatekha* ('in your righteousness') — God's own righteous character is the basis for the request.

41. Vav stanza (vv. 41-48). Every verse begins with the Hebrew letter vav. The stanza opens with a petition for God's chesed ('faithful love') — the covenant loyalty that defines God's commitment to his people. The word teshu'atekha ('your salvation') parallels the faithful love: salvation is the concrete expression of chesed.
42. The psalmist needs an answer (e'eneh) for his mockers (chorfi, 'those who reproach me'). The answer is not a clever argument but a reality: if God's faithful love comes (v. 41), the psalmist will have something to point to. The basis of his confidence is batachti bidvarekha ('I trust in your word').
43. The verb natsal ('to snatch away') in the Hiphil here means to take away forcefully. The psalmist fears losing the devar emet ('word of truth') — the ability to speak truth. The verb yachal ('to wait, to hope') describes patient expectation directed at God's judgments.
44. The phrase tamid le'olam va'ed ('continually, forever and ever') stacks three time expressions for emphasis. The psalmist's commitment to keeping Torah is not temporary but lifelong and, in his aspiration, eternal.
45. The word rechavah is related to rachav ('wide, broad') from verse 32. The psalmist's experience of freedom is directly connected to his engagement with God's precepts — obedience produces liberty, not bondage.
46. The psalmist envisions speaking (adabberah) of God's testimonies in the presence of melakhim ('kings'). The phrase velo evosh ('and I will not be ashamed') reveals courage rooted in conviction. Where rulers conspired against the psalmist in verse 23, here the psalmist speaks before kings without shame.
47. The verb sha'a in the Hitpael (eshtasha) again describes luxuriant delight. The addition of asher ahavti ('which I love') makes the emotion explicit: delight and love together describe the psalmist's relationship to God's commandments.
48. Lifting hands (essa khappai) is a gesture of prayer, worship, and reaching — the psalmist stretches toward God's commandments as a worshiper stretches toward God. The stanza closes with meditation (asichah) on statutes.
49. Zayin stanza (vv. 49-56). Every verse begins with the Hebrew letter zayin. The stanza opens with zekhor ('remember') — an imperative addressed to God. The psalmist is not reminding a forgetful God but calling on God to act on what he has already said.
50. The word nechamati ('my comfort') from nacham identifies what sustains the psalmist through onyi ('suffering, affliction'). The source: ki imratekha chiyatni ('for your promise has revived me'). God's spoken promise has actual life-giving power.
51. The zedim ('arrogant') reappear from verse 21 — persistent antagonists throughout the psalm. The verb luts ('to mock, to scorn') in the Hiphil describes withering ridicule. Despite intense mockery (ad me'od), the psalmist has not turned aside (lo natiti) from God's torah.
52. The phrase me'olam ('from of old') points to God's historical track record of just rulings. Remembering God's past judgments produces comfort (va'etneham) in the present. In verse 49 the psalmist asked God to remember; here he himself remembers.
53. The word zal'afah ('burning heat, indignation') describes an intense emotional reaction — the psalmist is physically seized (achazatni) by scorching anger at the wicked's abandonment of Torah. The reshaim ('wicked') are defined as ozvei toratekha ('those who abandon your instruction').
54. The word meguray ('my sojourning') from gur ('to sojourn') reinforces the theme from verse 19: the psalmist is a traveler, and God's statutes are his traveling songs.
55. The nighttime remembrance (zakharti ballailah) suggests lying awake — the psalmist's waking hours in the dark are spent remembering God's name (shimkha). The name is not just a label but the full character and identity of God.
56. The demonstrative zo't ('this') sums up everything described in the stanza — the comfort, the songs, the nighttime remembrance — and attributes it all to guarding God's precepts.
57. Chet stanza (vv. 57-64). Every verse begins with the Hebrew letter chet. The stanza moves from declaration of God as the psalmist's portion to urgent petition for grace, and it ends with one of the psalm's warmest statements about community.
58. The verb chillah ('to entreat, to seek favor') literally means to make someone's face smooth or pleasant — to seek favorable attention. The petition chonneni ('be gracious to me') from chanan asks for unmerited favor based on God's own promise.
59. The verb chishav ('to think, to reckon, to consider') describes careful self-examination. The result of honest reflection is turning (va'ashivah, 'I caused to return') his feet toward God's testimonies. Self-examination leads to course correction.
60. The verb chush ('to hurry') paired with lo hitmahemahti ('I did not linger') creates urgency — the psalmist did not procrastinate in his return to obedience.
61. The word chevlei ('ropes, cords, snares') from chevel describes being bound or trapped. Despite being physically ensnared, the psalmist's mind remains free: toratekha lo shakhachti ('your instruction I have not forgotten'). The body may be bound, but the memory of Torah cannot be taken.
62. Chatsot lailah ('midnight') is the darkest hour — and the psalmist rises (aqum) not from fear but from gratitude. The midnight thanksgiving for mishpetei tsidqekha ('your righteous judgments') suggests that even in the darkest circumstances, the psalmist finds reason to praise God's justice.
63. The word chaver ('companion, friend') describes a bond based on shared commitment. The psalmist's community is defined not by tribe or geography but by shared reverence for God and shared obedience to his precepts.

- 64.** The declaration chasdekha YHWH male'ah ha'arets ('your faithful love fills the earth') is a cosmic statement — God's chesed saturates the entire created order. From this abundance, the psalmist draws a specific request: teach me your statutes.
- 65.** Tet stanza (vv. 65-72). Every verse begins with the Hebrew letter tet. The word tov ('good') is the stanza's theme — the psalmist will use it seven times in eight verses. The opening declaration tov asita ('good you have done') is a retrospective acknowledgment: God has kept his word, and the result has been good.
- 66.** The phrase tuv ta'am vada'at ('good discernment and knowledge') combines two faculties: ta'am ('taste, discernment, judgment') and da'at ('knowledge, awareness'). The psalmist wants both: the capacity to know and the capacity to judge well.
- 67.** The verb anah in the Niphal ('I was humbled/afflicted') is the same root used for the Day of Atonement fasting (Leviticus 16:29). The suffering described is formative — it changed the psalmist's trajectory.
- 68.** The declaration tov attah umetiv ('you are good and you do good') is theologically foundational — God's character (good) and God's actions (does good) are perfectly aligned. If God is good and does good, then teaching his statutes is consistent with his nature.
- 69.** The verb taphal ('to smear, to plaster, to fabricate') describes the arrogant coating the psalmist with falsehood — literally plastering lies onto him. Against this external fabrication, the psalmist opposes internal wholeness: bekhol lev etsor piqqudekha.
- 70.** The verb tapash ('to be gross, to be insensitive') describes the enemies' hearts as chelev ('fat') — insensitive, unable to feel or perceive. A fat heart is a numb heart. Where their heart is deadened, the psalmist's heart is alive with delight (shi'asha'ti) in Torah.
- 71.** This verse completes the thought from verse 67: suffering was pedagogical — it taught what comfort could not teach. The psalmist does not glorify suffering but acknowledges its instructive function.
- 72.** The phrase torat pikha ('the instruction of your mouth') personalizes the torah — it comes from God's own mouth, not from an impersonal legal code. The comparison me'alfei zahav vakhasef ('than thousands of gold and silver') echoes verse 14's comparison to wealth.
- 73.** Yod stanza (vv. 73-80). Every verse begins with the Hebrew letter yod. The stanza opens with a creation claim: yadekha asuni vayekhonnenu ('your hands made me and established me'). From this creation comes a logical request: the God who made the psalmist should give him understanding to learn God's commandments.
- 74.** The yere'ekha ('those who fear you') form the psalmist's community. They rejoice when they see him because his hope in God's word is a visible testimony — his perseverance through suffering encourages others who share his reverence.
- 75.** The claim ve'emunah innitani ('in faithfulness you afflicted me') is extraordinary — the suffering was not a failure of God's love but an expression of it. This is the same emunah that defines God's covenant character (Exodus 34:6), now applied to the experience of pain.
- 76.** The combination of chesed ('faithful love') and imrah ('promise') creates a double foundation: God's character (faithful love) and God's speech (his promise). Comfort rests on both who God is and what God has said.
- 77.** The word rachamekha ('your compassion') from rechem ('womb') carries visceral warmth. The psalmist needs this compassion to live (ve'echyeh) — without it, death is the alternative.
- 78.** The psalmist asks that the zedim receive the shame they tried to inflict on him. His response is not retaliation but meditation (asiach) on God's precepts.
- 79.** The verb yashuvu ('let them return') asks for the restoration of community. Persecution may have isolated the psalmist, and he asks God to rebuild his fellowship with the faithful.
- 80.** The prayer yehi libbi tamim ('let my heart be blameless/complete') uses the same word tamim from verse 1 — the psalmist wants the wholeness he praised in others to become his own reality.
- 81.** Kaph stanza (vv. 81-88). Every verse begins with the Hebrew letter kaph. This is one of the psalm's darkest stanzas — the psalmist is exhausted, eyes failing, skin shriveled, nearly destroyed. The verb kalah ('to be finished, to be consumed') describes the soul reaching its limit.
- 82.** The eyes fail (khalu) from straining to see the fulfillment of God's promise. The question matai tenachameni ('when will you comfort me?') is one of the psalm's rawest cries — it does not question whether God will comfort but when.
- 83.** A wineskin (no'd) hung in smoke (qitor) shrivels, darkens, and cracks — it becomes useless and unrecognizable. The psalmist uses this image for his own condition: dried out, shrunken, damaged. Yet even in this shriveled state, he has not forgotten God's statutes.
- 84.** The question kammah yemei avdekha ('how many are the days of your servant?') is a plea about the shortness and weariness of life. The psalmist wants God to act while there is still life left.
- 85.** The verb karah ('to dig') describes the zedim setting traps — shichot ('pits') dug in the psalmist's path. The relative clause defines the arrogant by their disregard for Torah.
- 86.** The declaration kol mitsvotekha emunah ('all your commandments are faithfulness') makes emunah the defining quality of everything God commands. The cry ozreni ('help me!') is one of the psalm's most urgent petitions.

- 87.** The word *kim'at* ('almost, nearly') reveals how close the psalmist came to annihilation. Despite being brought to the brink, the psalmist did not abandon God's precepts.
- 88.** The petition *kechasdekha chayyeni* ('according to your faithful love, revive me') makes God's *chesed* the basis for the plea for life. The phrase *edut pikha* ('testimony of your mouth') personalizes the source.
- 89.** Lamed stanza (vv. 89-96). Every verse begins with the Hebrew letter lamed. This stanza is the psalm's cosmological high point — it moves from heaven to earth to the limits of perfection, grounded in the permanence of God's word.
- 90.** The phrase *ledor vador* extends God's *emunah* ('faithfulness') across all human history. The proof is the earth itself: *konanta erets vatta'amod* ('you established the earth and it stands'). The ground under our feet testifies to the reliability of the God who set it in place.
- 91.** The entire cosmos stands by God's judgments. The declaration *ki hakkol avadekha* ('for all things are your servants') is breathtaking: everything that exists serves God. The cosmos is not autonomous but obedient.
- 92.** The conditional *lulei* ('if not') introduces a counterfactual: without Torah as delight, the psalmist would have been destroyed by his affliction. This is not hyperbole — the psalmist credits Torah-delight with saving his life.
- 93.** The pledge *le'olam lo eshach* ('I will never forget') is absolute. The reason: *ki vam chiyitani* ('for by them you have revived me'). The precepts are instruments through which God gives life.
- 94.** The declaration *lekha ani* ('I am yours') is one of the psalm's most intimate statements — a claim of belonging, ownership, covenant identity. Because I belong to you, you are responsible for my rescue.
- 95.** The verb *qivvu* ('they wait, they lie in wait') describes patient, predatory waiting. Against this lethal patience, the psalmist sets his own careful attention: *edotekha etbonan* ('your testimonies I consider').
- 96.** The adjective *rechavah* ('wide, broad') echoes verse 45's *rechavah* ('broad place') — the spaciousness that comes from engaging with God's precepts. Here the broadness is attributed to God's commandment itself.
- 97.** Mem stanza (vv. 97-104). Every verse begins with the Hebrew letter mem. The stanza opens with an exclamation of love: *mah ahavti torathekha* ('how I love your instruction!'). Torah-meditation is not a scheduled activity but a constant state of mind.
- 98.** The verb *chakam* in the Piel (*techakkemeni*, 'you make me wise') attributes wisdom directly to God's commandments. The comparative *me'oyevai* ('more than my enemies') says engagement with God's commandments produces wisdom surpassing what opponents possess.
- 99.** The claim is not arrogance but a statement about the source of wisdom: teachers taught the psalmist, but God's testimonies give deeper insight (*sekhel*). The verb *sakhal* describes practical wisdom — the ability to navigate life skillfully.
- 100.** The progression — wiser than enemies (v. 98), more insightful than teachers (v. 99), more understanding than elders (v. 100) — climbs the hierarchy of wisdom. Guarding God's specific instructions produces understanding that exceeds accumulated human experience.
- 101.** The verb *kala'* ('to restrain, to hold back') describes deliberate self-restraint. Restraint from evil is not an end in itself but a means of preserving faithfulness to God's word.
- 102.** The emphasis on *attah* ('you') highlights that God is the personal instructor. When God teaches directly, the student does not wander.
- 103.** The verb *malats* ('to be smooth, to be sweet') describes the sensation of God's promise on the palate. The comparison *middvash* ('sweeter than honey') echoes Psalm 19:10. The psalmist experiences God's word sensorially — it has a taste, and the taste is sweet.
- 104.** Understanding gained from God's precepts produces a moral consequence: hatred of every false path. The stronger one's understanding of truth becomes, the stronger the repulsion toward falsehood.
- 105.** Nun stanza (vv. 105-112). Every verse begins with the Hebrew letter nun. The word *ner* is a small, portable oil lamp — the kind a person would carry at night on a dark road. This is not abstract enlightenment but practical illumination for a real journey.
- 106.** The verb *nishba* ('I have sworn') describes a formal oath — a binding commitment. The verb *aqayyemah* ('I will confirm') from *qum* means to stand by the oath, to make it real.
- 107.** The verb *anah* ('to be afflicted') with *ad me'od* ('exceedingly') describes severe suffering. The cry *chayyeni kidvarekha* is the psalm's recurring lifeline.
- 108.** The *nidvot pi* ('freewill offerings of my mouth') are voluntary offerings of praise and prayer — not sacrificial animals but words spoken freely. Worship is the proper posture for receiving instruction.
- 109.** The phrase *nafshi vekhappi tamid* ('my life is in my palm continually') is an idiom for living in constant danger. Despite perpetual risk, the psalmist does not forget Torah.
- 110.** The word *pach* ('trap, snare') describes a concealed device. The traps failed to divert the psalmist from the path.
- 111.** The verb *nachal* ('to inherit') treats God's testimonies as the legacy the psalmist has received and will hold forever. The word *sason* ('joy, exultation') describes the purest happiness.

- 112.** The verb *natah* ('to incline') describes the psalmist deliberately directing his heart toward obedience. In verse 36 he asked God to incline his heart; here he inclines it himself. Both are true — the psalmist acts, and God enables.
- 113.** Samekh stanza (vv. 113-120). Every verse begins with the Hebrew letter samekh. The word *se'appim* is rare — it may mean 'divided ones, double-minded people' (from *sa'aph*, 'to divide'). The contrast with loving Torah is clear: the psalmist rejects divided loyalty.
- 114.** The words *sitri* ('my hiding place') and *maginni* ('my shield') describe God as both passive protection (a place to hide) and active protection (a shield that deflects blows).
- 115.** The imperative *suru* ('depart') is addressed directly to the *mere'im* ('evildoers'). The phrase *mitsvot Elohai* ('commandments of my God') uses the personal possessive — my God — emphasizing the personal relationship that motivates obedience.
- 116.** The verb *samakh* ('to support, to sustain') asks God to hold the psalmist up. The plea *al tevisheni misivri* ('do not let me be ashamed of my hope') reveals the deepest fear: that hoping in God might prove to be a mistake.
- 117.** The verb *sa'ad* ('to support, to sustain') is parallel to *samakh* in verse 116. Safety and sustained attention to Torah go together.
- 118.** The verb *salah* ('to reject, to make light of') describes God dismissing those who wander from his statutes. Their *tarmit* ('deceit, cunning') is *sheqer* ('falsehood') — their cleverness is built on nothing.
- 119.** The word *sigim* ('dross, slag') is the waste material from metal refining. God puts away the wicked like impurities being skimmed off molten metal. Because God purifies, the psalmist loves the testimonies that define the standard.
- 120.** The verb *samar* ('to bristle, to shudder') describes a physical reaction — the psalmist's skin prickles and hair stands up in response to God's presence. This is not terror but awe — the bodily response to encountering something overwhelming.
- 121.** Ayin stanza (vv. 121-128). Every verse begins with the Hebrew letter ayin. The psalmist claims moral integrity as the basis for petition: do not leave me to my oppressors.
- 122.** The verb *arav* ('to pledge, to be surety') asks God to stand as guarantor — to co-sign the psalmist's future. This is financial language applied to the covenant relationship.
- 123.** As in verse 82, the eyes fail from straining to see deliverance. Both God's saving act and God's righteous word are delayed, and the waiting exhausts the psalmist's sight.
- 124.** The petition asks God to let *chesed* be the standard by which he treats the psalmist — not strict justice but covenant loyalty.
- 125.** The declaration *avdekha ani* ('your servant I am') reaffirms the psalmist's identity. Knowledge of God's testimonies comes only through divinely given understanding.
- 126.** The phrase *et la'asot laYHWH* ('it is time for the LORD to act') is an urgent call for divine intervention. The verb *parar* ('to break, to annul') in the Hiphil describes deliberate shattering of Torah.
- 127.** Because others break Torah, the psalmist loves it more. The comparison uses two words for gold — *zahav* and *paz* (the purest, most refined gold). Even the finest gold falls short.
- 128.** The emphatic repetition *kol piqqudei khol* ('all precepts, all of them') insists on comprehensiveness. The stanza closes with hatred of falsehood that matches verse 104.
- 129.** Pe stanza (vv. 129-136). Every verse begins with the Hebrew letter pe. The word *pela'ot* ('wonderful, beyond comprehension') describes the testimonies as exceeding normal understanding. The response to wonder is guarding.
- 130.** The word *petayim* ('simple, naive') from *patah* describes someone open and impressionable — capable of being shaped for good or ill. God's words provide the shaping that turns simplicity into understanding.
- 131.** The verb *pa'ar* ('to open wide') and *sha'aph* ('to gasp, to pant') together picture someone gasping for air. The psalmist pants for God's commandments the way a thirsty animal pants for water.
- 132.** The phrase *kemishpat le'ohavei shemekha* ('according to the custom for those who love your name') appeals to precedent: God has a pattern of being gracious to his lovers, and the psalmist asks to be included.
- 133.** The verb *kun* ('to establish, to make firm') asks God to make the psalmist's steps stable. The verb *shalat* ('to rule, to have dominion') pictures sin as a potential ruler — the psalmist asks God to prevent sin from exercising sovereignty over his life.
- 134.** The verb *padah* ('to ransom, to redeem') asks God to pay the price to free the psalmist from oppression. Obedience is the fruit of liberation.
- 135.** The petition *panekha ha'er* ('make your face shine') echoes the Aaronic blessing of Numbers 6:25. The shining face of God represents favor, attention, and warmth.
- 136.** The word *palgei* (from *peleg*, 'channel, stream') describes permanent water channels, not temporary rivulets. The psalmist's weeping is sustained, not episodic.

- 137.** Tsade stanza (vv. 137-144). Every verse begins with the Hebrew letter tsade. The stanza opens with a declaration of God's character: tsaddiq attah YHWH. God's judgments are yashar ('upright, straight, level') — not crooked or biased.
- 138.** God's testimonies are characterized by tsedek ('righteousness') and emunah ('faithfulness') — righteous in content and faithful in reliability.
- 139.** The verb tsamat ('to destroy, to consume') describes the psalmist being consumed by his own qin'ah ('zeal'). The cause is that his enemies have forgotten God's words — this is covenant grief, not self-pity.
- 140.** The adjective tserufah ('refined, purified') from tsaraph ('to smelt, to refine') describes God's promise as having passed through fire — all impurities burned away. This is metallurgy applied to speech.
- 141.** The psalmist describes himself as tsa'ir ('small, insignificant') and nivzeh ('despised'). Faithfulness to God's word is not a function of social standing.
- 142.** God's righteousness does not expire or diminish. And vetoratekha emet ('your instruction is truth') equates Torah with truth itself. Two of the psalm's most absolute claims.
- 143.** The words tsar ('trouble, narrowness') and matsoq ('anguish, straits') describe being hemmed in — the opposite of the spaciousness of verse 45. Delight persists even when circumstances squeeze.
- 144.** Eternal truth requires ongoing personal illumination. The testimonies do not change, but the psalmist must continually receive new capacity to understand them.
- 145.** Qoph stanza (vv. 145-152). Every verse begins with the Hebrew letter qoph. The stanza is marked by urgent crying — the psalmist calls, rises early, stays up late, all in desperate petition.
- 146.** The cry hoshi'eni ('save me') is direct and unadorned. Rescue frees the psalmist for obedience.
- 147.** The verb qiddam ('to precede, to come before') with banneshef ('in the twilight/dawn') means the psalmist gets up before the sun. The predawn darkness is filled with crying and hope.
- 148.** The ashmurot ('night watches') are the divisions of the night. The psalmist's eyes are already open before each watch begins — he stays awake to meditate on God's promise.
- 149.** The petition combines two appeals: hear me according to chesed and revive me according to mishpat. Both God's love and God's justice point toward life.
- 150.** The spatial contrast is vivid: the pursuers of zimmah ('evil schemes') draw near to the psalmist but are far from God's instruction. Physical proximity to the wicked corresponds to their spiritual distance from Torah.
- 151.** Against the nearness of the wicked (v. 150), the psalmist affirms: qarov attah YHWH ('you are near'). God is closer than the enemies. And all God's commandments are emet ('truth').
- 152.** The word qedem ('long ago') indicates the psalmist has known this for a long time. The verb yasad ('to found, to establish') pictures the testimonies as having an unshakable foundation — grounded for eternity.
- 153.** Resh stanza (vv. 153-160). Every verse begins with the Hebrew letter resh. The stanza opens with a plea to be seen: re'eh onyi ('see my suffering'). The verb chalats ('to draw out, to rescue') asks God to pull the psalmist out of danger.
- 154.** The verb riv ('to contend, to plead a case') asks God to serve as legal advocate. The verb ga'al ('to redeem, to act as kinsman-redeemer') asks God to buy the psalmist back. Both are legal-relational terms: God as lawyer and God as redeemer.
- 155.** Those who refuse to seek God's decrees cut themselves off from salvation. The logic is causal: no seeking, no finding.
- 156.** God's rachamim ('mercies, compassion') are rabbim ('many, great'). God's judgments point toward life, not death.
- 157.** Despite being outnumbered, the psalmist has not turned aside from God's testimonies.
- 158.** The word bogedim ('faithless, treacherous') describes covenant breakers. The verb qut in the Hitpolel describes a visceral reaction of loathing.
- 159.** The imperative re'eh asks God to look at the psalmist's love. Human love for God's precepts and divine faithful love together form the ground of the plea for revival.
- 160.** The word rosh is debated: 'the beginning of your word is truth' (temporal) or 'the sum of your word is truth' (comprehensive). The rendering 'the sum of your word' captures the comprehensive sense.
- 161.** Shin stanza (vv. 161-168). Every verse begins with the Hebrew letter shin. The sarim from verse 23 return. The verb pachad ('to tremble, to be in awe') describes the heart's response to God's word as more powerful than its response to human threats.
- 162.** The comparison kemotse shalal rav ('like one who finds great plunder') evokes the elation of discovering vast, unexpected treasure. God's promise is windfall wealth.
- 163.** Two verbs of revulsion (sane'ti and va'ata'evah) are stacked against one verb of love. The psalmist despises deception with double intensity and loves Torah with simple, direct affection.

- 164.** The number sheva ('seven') may be literal or may represent completeness — the psalmist praises God a full, complete number of times throughout the day.
- 165.** The word shalom from shalem ('to be complete, to be whole') is one of the richest words in Hebrew. Here modified by rav ('great'), it describes overflowing peace from loving God's instruction. The word mikshol ('stumbling block') comes from kashal ('to stumble').
- 166.** Hope and obedience coexist. The psalmist does not wait passively for God to act but obeys actively while waiting.
- 167.** Soul-keeping and deep love together describe the most complete devotion possible.
- 168.** The motivating clause *ki khol derakhay negdekha* ('for all my ways are before you') reveals awareness that God sees everything. Nothing is hidden, and this awareness motivates faithfulness.
- 169.** Tav stanza (vv. 169-176). Every verse begins with the Hebrew letter tav, the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The psalm's final stanza is a cascade of petitions — the psalmist has reached the end of the alphabet and pours out his final requests.
- 170.** The word *techinnati* ('my supplication, my plea for grace') from *chanan* is a request for unmerited favor. The petition *hatssileni* ('deliver me') asks God to snatch the psalmist out of danger.
- 171.** The verb *nava* ('to bubble up, to pour forth') describes praise flowing from the lips like water from a spring. Teaching produces praise.
- 172.** The verb *anah* ('to answer, to sing, to respond') describes the tongue responding to God's promise — the tongue sings because it has been addressed.
- 173.** The petition asks for God's active intervention — his hand, not just his attention. The basis is choice: *ki piqudekha bacharti* ('for I have chosen your precepts').
- 174.** The psalmist's longing for God's salvation is undiminished at the psalm's end. And *toratekha sha'ashu'ai* ('your instruction is my delight') repeats the central claim one final time.
- 175.** The petition *techi nafshi* ('let my soul live') is the psalm's final cry for life. The purpose of life is praise: *utehallekka*. Life is not an end in itself but the means by which praise continues.
- 176.** This final verse reframes the entire psalm. The psalmist is not a paragon of perfection but a wanderer who loves what he cannot perfectly keep. The tension between 'I have not forgotten your commandments' and 'I have wandered like a lost sheep' is the tension of the entire human relationship with God's word: we know it, we love it, we stray from it, and we need to be found.

120

Summary: *Psalm 120 is the first of the fifteen Songs of Ascents (Psalms 120-134), a collection traditionally associated with pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The psalmist cries out to the LORD from a place of exile among deceitful, war-loving people. He describes himself as living in Meshech and dwelling among the tents of Kedar — both far-flung locations that represent hostile foreign territory. The psalm is a lament of displacement: the psalmist longs for peace but is surrounded by those who want war.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The Songs of Ascents (shir ha-ma'alot) are the 'pilgrimage playlist' of ancient Israel — songs sung by worshipers as they traveled up to Jerusalem for the three annual festivals. Psalm 120 begins the journey at the point of maximum distance from Jerusalem, both geographically and spiritually. The psalmist is among liars and warmongers, far from the peace of Zion. The collection will gradually move closer to Jerusalem and the Temple, arriving at the priestly blessing in Psalm 134. The structure of the entire collection enacts the journey from exile to worship. Beginning with a lament is significant: the pilgrimage does not start from a place of strength but from a place of suffering.*

Translation Friction: *Meshech was a region in Anatolia (modern Turkey), and Kedar was an Arabian desert tribe — placing the psalmist simultaneously in both locations is geographically impossible. Most scholars understand these as metaphorical: Meshech and Kedar represent the far north and the far south, together meaning 'I am as far from Jerusalem as it is possible to be.' The psalm's language about lying lips and deceitful tongues suggests the psalmist's primary suffering is social rather than physical — he is surrounded by people who cannot be trusted.*

Connections: Psalm 120 begins the Songs of Ascents (120-134), a coherent collection with its own internal progression. The theme of lying tongues connects to Psalms 12, 52, and 140. Meshech appears in Genesis 10:2 and Ezekiel 38-39 as a distant, threatening people. Kedar appears in Song of Solomon 1:5, Isaiah 21:16-17, and Jeremiah 49:28-29 as desert-dwelling warriors. The longing for shalom ('peace') in verse 7 anticipates Psalm 122:6-8, where the pilgrim prays for the peace of Jerusalem.

¹A Song of Ascents.

In my distress I called to the LORD,
and He answered me.

²LORD, rescue my life
from lying lips,
from the deceitful tongue.

³What will He give you,
and what more will He add to you,
you deceitful tongue?

⁴Sharp arrows of a warrior,
with burning coals of broom wood.

⁵What misery for me,
that I live as a foreigner in Meshech,
that I dwell among the tents of Kedar!

⁶Too long my soul has lived
among those who hate peace.

⁷I am for peace,
but when I speak, they choose war.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The superscription *shir ha-ma'alot* appears on all fifteen psalms of this collection. The word *ma'alot* comes from the root *alah* ('to go up, to ascend'). The phrase *batzaratah li* ('in my distress, in my narrow place') uses *tzarah* ('distress, trouble, tight place'), the same word family as *metzar* in Psalm 118:5. The pilgrimage begins from a place of constriction.
2. The prayer *hatzilah nafshi* ('rescue my life') is directed against *sfat sheqer* ('lips of falsehood') and *lashon remiyyah* ('tongue of deceit'). The psalmist's primary enemy is not a sword but a mouth. The suffering described throughout this psalm is social and verbal — he is surrounded by people whose words are weapons. The word *remiyyah* ('deceit, treachery') suggests calculated deception, not casual dishonesty.
3. The formula *mah yitten lekha umah yossif lakh* parallels the oath formula *koh ya'aseh lekha Elohim ve-koh yossif* ('thus may God do to you and thus may He add'). By using this pattern, the psalmist implies that the deceitful tongue is under divine oath-curse — God will deal with it as one deals with a perjurer.
4. The *retamim* ('broom wood, broom plant') is identified with *Retama raetam*, a desert shrub whose roots produce charcoal of exceptional heat and duration. Bedouin traditions confirm that broom-wood coals retain heat far longer than other fuels. The imagery suggests a slow, thorough burning — not a flash fire but sustained heat.
5. The verb *garti* ('I sojourned') means to live as a resident alien, without permanent rights or status. The verb *shakhanti* ('I dwelt') is the same root as the *Shekhinah* (divine presence) and the *mishkan* (tabernacle) — but here the psalmist dwells not in God's presence but among those hostile to God's people. The contrast is painful.
6. *Rabbat shakhenah lah nafshi im sonch shalom* ('too long has my soul dwelt with those who hate peace') — the word *rabbat* ('much, too much, too long') expresses exhaustion. The psalmist has endured this exile beyond what is bearable. His neighbors are described as *sonch shalom* ('those who hate peace') — peace itself is what they oppose. The word *shalom* ('peace, wholeness, well-being') is the opposite of everything the psalmist's environment represents.

7. The stark brevity of the final line is powerful: *ani shalom* ('I — peace') versus *hemmah lammilchamah* ('they — for war'). The contrast is absolute. The psalmist does not elaborate or explain — the two realities are placed side by side and left to speak for themselves. The lack of resolution is deliberate: the Songs of Ascents will provide the resolution as the pilgrim moves progressively closer to Jerusalem across Psalms 121-134.

121

Summary: *A pilgrim lifts his eyes toward the hills surrounding Jerusalem and asks where help will come from. The answer is immediate and absolute: from the LORD, maker of heaven and earth. The psalm then unfolds as a sustained assurance of divine protection — God does not sleep, does not slumber, guards every step, shields from sun and moon, and keeps the traveler from all harm, now and forever.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The psalm pivots on a single question and answer in verses 1-2, then spends the remaining six verses elaborating that answer with escalating confidence. The verb *shamar* ('to keep, to guard') appears six times in eight verses — an extraordinary density that turns the psalm into a litany of watchfulness. God is not merely powerful; God is attentive. The negation in verses 3-4 is emphatic: the one who guards Israel *lo yanum ve-lo yishan* ('neither slumbers nor sleeps'). In a world where ancient peoples believed their gods slept (Elijah mocks Baal's worshipers with this in *1 Kings 18:27*), this claim is radical. The God of Israel is perpetually awake, perpetually watching.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase 'I lift my eyes to the hills' (*essa einai el heharim*) has been romanticized in English-speaking devotion as a statement of finding comfort in nature. The Hebrew is more ambiguous — the hills could be the Judean hills where Jerusalem sits, but they could also be the high places where pagan shrines operated. The question 'where does my help come from?' may carry an edge: not from the hilltop altars, but from the LORD who made the hills themselves. The pilgrimage context supports this reading — the traveler is en route to Jerusalem and passing hills dotted with competing shrines.*

Connections: *As the second of the fifteen Songs of Ascents (Psalms 120-134), this psalm moves the pilgrim from the distress of Psalm 120 (dwelling among hostile people) to active trust on the road to Jerusalem. The six-fold repetition of *shamar* anticipates Psalm 127:1 ('unless the LORD guards the city'). The declaration that God is 'maker of heaven and earth' (*oseh shamayim va-arets*) becomes a liturgical refrain in the Ascents collection (see Psalms 124:8, 134:3).*

¹A song of ascents.

I lift my eyes to the hills —
where does my help come from?

²My help comes from the LORD,
maker of heaven and earth.

³He will not let your foot slip —
your guardian does not slumber.

⁴Look — he neither slumbers nor sleeps,
the guardian of Israel.

⁵The LORD is your guardian;
the LORD is your shade at your right hand.

⁶The sun will not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.

⁷The LORD will guard you from all harm;
he will guard your life.

⁸The LORD will guard your going out and your coming in,
from this moment and forever.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The definite article on heharim ('the hills') specifies particular hills — the hills the pilgrim can see, the hills on the road to Jerusalem. These are not abstract mountains but the terrain of the journey.
1. The question-and-answer format in verses 1-2 may reflect antiphonal singing: one voice asks, another responds. This liturgical structure was common in pilgrimage worship.
2. The answer is fronted for emphasis: ezri me-im YHWH ('my help — from the LORD'). The title oseh shamayim va-arets ('maker of heaven and earth') is not decorative; it grounds the pilgrim's confidence in God's sovereignty over all created reality. The God who made the hills is greater than anything on them.
3. The verb mot ('to slip, to totter, to be shaken') describes the danger of losing footing on mountain paths. The promise is viscerally physical: God watches the pilgrim's feet on uneven ground. The shift from first person ('my help') to second person ('your foot') may indicate a priestly or companion voice now addressing the pilgrim directly.
4. We render hinneh as 'look' rather than the archaic 'behold.' The Hebrew particle is attention-grabbing and conversational, not formal.
4. The escalation from yanum to yishan is deliberate. yanum is a light doze; yishan is deep sleep. The psalm denies both, from the lesser to the greater.
5. Tsilekha ('your shade') is not metaphorical luxury — for a pilgrim walking through the Judean wilderness under Mediterranean sun, shade is survival. The right hand (yad yeminekha) is the side of vulnerability in battle, where a warrior's sword arm leaves the body exposed. God positions himself precisely where the pilgrim is most unprotected.
6. The verb yakkekah ('strike you') is strong — the same verb used for military attack. The sun's assault is heatstroke, a real danger for ancient travelers. The moon's striking is less obvious to modern readers; ancient Near Eastern belief held that moonlight could cause illness, madness, or seizures (the English word 'lunatic' preserves this idea). The pairing covers the full cycle: day and night, the pilgrim is shielded.
7. The word ra here means 'harm' or 'calamity' rather than moral evil — the psalm promises protection from danger, not from temptation. The parallel yishmor et nafshekha ('he will guard your life/soul') uses nefesh in its primary Hebrew sense of 'life, self, being' — not the Greek philosophical concept of an immaterial soul. God guards the whole person.
8. The phrase 'going out and coming in' (tset u-vo) is a standard Hebrew merism for the totality of daily life. It appears in Deuteronomy 28:6, where God blesses Israel's going out and coming in as part of the covenant blessings. The pilgrim psalm echoes covenantal language.

122

Summary: A psalm of David for pilgrimage. The speaker recalls the joy of being invited to go to the house of the LORD, then describes standing within Jerusalem's gates. The city is praised as a compact, unified place where the tribes gather for worship and where thrones of justice stand. The psalm closes with a prayer for Jerusalem's peace and prosperity — for the sake of family, friends, and the house of the LORD.

What Makes This Remarkable: This is the only Song of Ascents attributed to David, and it reads as though the pilgrim has arrived — feet are standing inside Jerusalem (v. 2). The psalm is structured around the name Yerushalayim, which appears three times (vv. 2, 3, 6) and whose sound echoes in the repeated shalom ('peace') of the closing verses. The wordplay shalu shalom Yerushalayim ('pray for the peace of Jerusalem') links the city's name to its destiny: Jerusalem is the city whose very name contains shalom, yet whose history is marked by conflict. The prayer for peace is both a wish and a reminder of what the name promises.

Translation Friction: The Davidic attribution (le-David) is debated. The psalm assumes a standing temple and established pilgrimage practice, which some scholars date later than David. However, the attribution may indicate Davidic authorship of a core text later adapted for pilgrimage use, or it may designate the psalm as belonging to a Davidic collection. The phrase sheshom alah shivtei Yah ('where the tribes of Yah go up') uses the shortened form of the divine name (Yah rather than YHWH), which is characteristic of liturgical

and poetic speech.

Connections: The prayer for Jerusalem's peace connects forward to Isaiah 62:6-7, where watchmen on Jerusalem's walls are commanded never to be silent until God establishes the city. The description of Jerusalem as a city 'joined together' (she-chubberah lah yachdav) anticipates the eschatological vision of a restored, unified Jerusalem in Ezekiel 48. The thrones of the house of David (v. 5) connect to the Davidic covenant of 2 Samuel 7.

¹A song of ascents. Of David.
 I was glad when they said to me,
 "Let us go to the house of the LORD."
²Our feet are standing
 within your gates, Jerusalem.
³Jerusalem — built as a city
 joined firmly together,
⁴There the tribes go up,
 the tribes of Yah —
 a decree for Israel —
 to give thanks to the name of the LORD.
⁵For there the thrones of justice are set,
 the thrones of the house of David.
⁶Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
 "May those who love you be secure."
⁷May peace be within your walls,
 security within your citadels.
⁸For the sake of my brothers and friends,
 let me say, "Peace be in you."
⁹For the sake of the house of the LORD our God,
 I will seek your good.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The Davidic superscription (le-David) appears on only four of the fifteen Songs of Ascents (122, 124, 131, 133). Whether this indicates authorship or dedication to a Davidic collection remains debated. The psalm presupposes an established pilgrimage system and a standing temple.
1. samachti is in the perfect tense, suggesting the joy is recalled — the pilgrim remembers the moment of invitation, perhaps now standing in Jerusalem looking back at that first summons.
2. The participle omedot ('standing') conveys present experience — the pilgrim is there, feet on the ground, inside the city. The shift from past tense (samachti, 'I was glad') to present participle creates a vivid sense of arrival. The gates (she'arayikh) are the entry points of the walled city, places of commerce, judgment, and greeting.
3. The verb chubberah is a pual passive participle — the city has been joined. The agent is unstated, which may imply divine agency: God is the one who bound this city together. The word yachdav ('together, as one') reinforces the theme of unity that dominates the psalm.
4. The shortened divine name Yah (shivtei Yah, 'tribes of Yah') is a poetic and liturgical form of YHWH, found frequently in Psalms and in the exclamation Hallelu-Yah. The phrase edut le-Yisrael ('a decree/testimony for Israel') refers to the commandment requiring pilgrimage to Jerusalem three times yearly (Deuteronomy 16:16). The purpose of the ascent is lehodot le-shem YHWH ('to give thanks to the name of the LORD') — thanksgiving is the engine of pilgrimage.

5. Jerusalem is not only a worship center but a judicial capital. The thrones (kis'ot) are seats of royal judgment. The phrase le-mishpat ('for justice') defines their purpose: the Davidic kings administer justice from Jerusalem. The repetition of kis'ot ('thrones') in parallel emphasizes the permanence and legitimacy of Davidic rule. This verse connects worship and governance — the same city that houses God's temple houses the king's court.
6. The wordplay sha'alu shalom Yerushalayim yishlayu is untranslatable in its full sonic density. Three words from the sh-l-m root cluster together. We translate for meaning, but the original creates an experience of the word shalom reverberating through the sentence.
7. chelekh ('your rampart, your outer wall') refers to the defensive fortifications surrounding the city. Armnotayikh ('your citadels, your palaces') refers to the inner strongholds and royal residences. The prayer moves from outer wall to inner palace — may peace saturate the city from its perimeter to its heart. The word shalvah ('security, tranquility, ease') is a cognate of shalom, continuing the sonic pattern.
8. The motivation shifts to the personal: the pilgrim prays for Jerusalem's peace because his family and companions live there or gather there. The phrase adabberah nna shalom bakh ('let me speak peace in you') is both a blessing and a commitment — the pilgrim pronounces peace over the city as a verbal act of devotion.
9. The psalm closes with a second and deeper motivation: not only for the sake of human relationships (v. 8) but for the sake of beit YHWH Eloheinu ('the house of the LORD our God'). The verb avaqshah ('I will seek') implies active pursuit — the pilgrim commits to working for Jerusalem's welfare. The word tov ('good') is comprehensive: prosperity, beauty, flourishing, everything that is right.

123

Summary: *The psalmist lifts his eyes to God enthroned in heaven, comparing Israel's posture to that of servants watching their master's hand for the slightest signal. The waiting continues until God shows mercy. The psalm closes with a raw cry: Israel has had more than enough of the contempt of the arrogant and the scorn of the comfortable.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This is one of the most concentrated psalms in the Psalter — four verses that move from silent watchfulness to desperate petition. The image of servants watching a master's hand (verses 2) is striking in its submission: the servant does not speak, does not demand, only watches. The hand will give food, give orders, give permission, or withhold. Everything depends on the hand. The psalm transfers this image directly to God: Israel watches God's hand with the same silent, total dependence. The repetition of channenu ('be gracious to us') twice in verse 3 breaks the silence of the watching — the servant finally speaks, and what comes out is not a request but a cry of saturation: we are filled to the brim with contempt.*

Translation Friction: *The servant-master imagery can be uncomfortable for modern readers, but the Hebrew context is specific. The eved ('servant') and shifchah ('maidservant') are members of a household, not chattel slaves in the modern sense — they have proximity to the master and depend on the master's hand for sustenance and direction. The psalm does not celebrate servitude; it uses the imagery of dependent watching to describe the posture of faith under oppression. The 'proud' and 'arrogant' (ge'ionim, sha'ananim) in verse 4 are unnamed — they could be foreign oppressors, domestic elites, or neighboring nations. The vagueness makes the psalm applicable to any situation of scorn.*

Connections: *The upward gaze echoes Psalm 121:1 ('I lift my eyes'), but here the eyes are lifted not to hills but to heaven itself. The servant imagery connects to Isaiah 50:4-5, where the Servant of the LORD has an ear awakened morning by morning to listen. The cry against contempt anticipates Nehemiah 4:4, where the returned exiles endure mockery during the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls.*

¹A song of ascents.

To you I lift my eyes,
you who are enthroned in heaven.

²Look — as the eyes of servants watch
the hand of their master,
as the eyes of a maidservant watch
the hand of her mistress,
so our eyes watch the LORD our God

until he shows us grace.

³Be gracious to us, LORD — be gracious to us,
for we have had more than enough of contempt.

⁴Our soul has had more than enough
of the mockery of the comfortable,
the contempt of the arrogant.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb *nasati* ('I lift') echoes Psalm 121:1 but redirects the gaze from the hills to God himself. The participle *hayyoshvi* ('the one sitting, the one enthroned') uses *yashav*, which can mean simply 'to sit' or, in royal contexts, 'to be enthroned.' God sits in heaven as a king on a throne — and the psalm positions the speaker as a subject before the sovereign.
2. We render *yechonnenu* as 'shows us grace' rather than 'have mercy upon us.' The verb *chanan* means to show favor, to be gracious, to give what is not owed. Mercy implies a response to suffering; grace implies a gift from the giver's character. The psalm asks for God to act out of who God is.
3. The doubled imperative *channenu YHWH channenu* ('be gracious to us, LORD, be gracious to us') is urgent repetition — the servant has broken silence and the words pour out. The verb *sava'nu* ('we are filled, we are sated, we have had enough') uses the language of eating to describe scorn: they have been force-fed contempt until they are stuffed with it. The word *buz* ('contempt, scorn') describes the attitude of those who look down with dismissive disdain.
4. The final phrase *lig'ei yonim* is textually difficult. The Masoretic pointing suggests 'the proud of the arrogant' or 'the arrogant oppressors.' Some emend *yonim* to read *ge'ionim* ('the arrogant'), creating a smoother parallel with *sha'ananim*. We follow the Masoretic text and render the sense as 'the arrogant,' since the doubling of pride-language intensifies the characterization.

124

Summary: *A psalm of David. The community looks back at a moment of extreme danger and shudders at what would have happened if the LORD had not been on their side. The imagery escalates from human attack to flood to wild beasts to a bird caught in a trap — and then the trap breaks and the bird escapes. The psalm ends with a declaration: our help is in the name of the LORD, maker of heaven and earth.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The psalm opens with a counterfactual — 'if the LORD had not been on our side' — and then repeats it, inviting the congregation to say it together (v. 1). This rhetorical device forces the worshipers to imagine the catastrophe that did not happen, making God's rescue vivid by contrast. The sequence of images is deliberately overwhelming: enemies swallowing them alive (v. 3), floodwaters sweeping over them (vv. 4-5), teeth of predators (v. 6), a snare closing on a bird (v. 7). Each image raises the stakes. Then the snare breaks — and the escape is sudden and unexplained. The psalm does not say how the trap broke, only that it did. The deliverance is attributed entirely to God without narrating God's method.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase *lulei YHWH she-hayah lanu* ('if the LORD had not been on our side') raises a theological tension the psalm does not resolve: what about the times when rescue did not come? The psalm is a thanksgiving for a specific deliverance, not a universal promise. Its honesty lies in what it does not claim — it does not say God always rescues, only that God rescued this time, and that without God's intervention, destruction was certain.*

Connections: *The closing formula *ezrenu be-shem YHWH oseh shamayim va-arets* ('our help is in the name of the LORD, maker of heaven and earth') echoes Psalm 121:2 and becomes a liturgical refrain in Psalm 134:3. The flood imagery connects to the chaotic waters of Psalm 69:1-2 and Jonah 2:3-5. The bird-and-snare image appears again in Psalm 91:3 and Proverbs 6:5.*

¹A song of ascents. Of David.
If the LORD had not been on our side —

let Israel say it —

²if the LORD had not been on our side
when people rose against us —

³then they would have swallowed us alive
when their anger burned against us.

⁴Then the waters would have engulfed us,
the torrent would have swept over our lives.

⁵Then over our lives would have swept
the raging waters.

⁶Blessed be the LORD,
who did not give us as prey to their teeth.

⁷We are like a bird escaped from the fowler's trap —
the trap broke and we escaped!

⁸Our help is in the name of the LORD,
maker of heaven and earth.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The particle *lulei* ('if not, were it not') introduces a counterfactual condition: what would have happened if God had not acted. The imperative *yomar na Yisrael* ('let Israel say') invites the congregation to join in — this is antiphonal, calling for a collective voice to rehearse the near-disaster. The psalm begins not with praise but with a terrifying 'what if.'
2. The repetition of *lulei YHWH she-hayah lanu* reinforces the counterfactual and builds suspense. The phrase *be-qum aleinu adam* ('when humanity rose against us') uses *adam* generically — not a specific enemy but human hostility itself. The threat is framed in universal terms.
3. The verb *bela'unu* ('swallowed us') evokes Sheol swallowing the living (Numbers 16:30-33, where the earth swallows Korah). The word *chayyim* ('alive') intensifies the horror — not merely killed and then consumed, but devoured while still living. The image is of monstrous, predatory destruction.
4. The imagery shifts from being devoured to being drowned. The verb *shetafunu* ('engulfed us, swept us away') describes flash flooding — a real and terrifying danger in the Judean wilderness, where dry wadis become raging torrents without warning. The *nachalah* ('torrent, stream, wadi') is seasonal and violent. The word *nafshenu* ('our lives, our selves') indicates total annihilation, not partial damage.
5. The adjective *hazeidonim* ('the raging, the insolent, the proud') personifies the water — it is not merely strong but arrogant, acting with the willfulness of a hostile agent. The same root *zadon* describes human arrogance elsewhere (Deuteronomy 17:12). The waters are characterized as enemies in their own right.
6. The shift from water to teeth is abrupt and effective. The psalm layers images without worrying about consistency — the rhetorical effect is cumulative. Each image says: the danger was total, and only God's intervention prevented it.
7. The *pach yqeshim* ('trap of fowlers') refers to a spring-loaded snare used for catching birds. The image of a bird in a trap was a common metaphor for helplessness in ancient Near Eastern literature. The sudden breaking of the trap — without explanation — is theologically deliberate: deliverance comes from outside the situation.
8. The closing declaration *ezrenu be-shem YHWH* ('our help is in the name of the LORD') echoes Psalm 121:2. The phrase *oseh shamayim va-arets* ('maker of heaven and earth') grounds the confession: the God who rescued Israel from the trap is the same God who made everything. The cosmic scope of God's power underwrites the specific, local rescue the psalm has just narrated.

125

Summary: *Those who trust in the LORD are compared to Mount Zion — immovable, permanent, settled forever. As mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people. The psalm then addresses the danger of wickedness gaining power over the righteous and prays that the upright will not be tempted to stretch their hands toward wrongdoing. It closes with a prayer for peace on Israel.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The psalm builds its theology on geography. The pilgrim approaching Jerusalem can see the physical reality the psalm describes: mountains encircle the city on every side — the Mount of Olives to the east, hills to the north, south, and west. Jerusalem sits in a bowl of mountains. The psalmist takes this visible fact and makes it a metaphor for divine protection: as the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people. The image is not of a single shield but of an encircling embrace — protection from every direction, permanent as the geology itself.*

Translation Friction: *Verse 3 introduces a complex theological concern: the scepter of wickedness (shevet haresha) must not rest on the land allotted to the righteous, lest the righteous themselves be corrupted and reach toward injustice. This is not a simple good-versus-evil framework — it acknowledges that oppression can deform the oppressed, that sustained injustice can tempt righteous people into wrongdoing. The psalm prays against this corruption, not merely against the oppressors.*

Connections: *The comparison of the faithful to Mount Zion connects to Isaiah 28:16, where God lays a foundation stone in Zion. The phrase shalom al Yisrael ('peace on Israel') closing the psalm echoes Psalm 128:6 and is nearly identical to the closing of Psalm 128. The concern about the 'scepter of wickedness' echoes the warnings of Deuteronomy about foreign rule corrupting Israel's covenant faithfulness.*

¹A song of ascents.

Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion —
it cannot be shaken; it endures forever.

²Jerusalem — mountains surround her,
and the LORD surrounds his people
from this moment and forever.

³For the scepter of wickedness will not rest
on the land allotted to the righteous,
so that the righteous will not stretch out
their hands toward injustice.

⁴Do good, LORD, to those who are good,
and to those who are upright in their hearts.

⁵But those who turn to crooked paths —
the LORD will lead them away with the evildoers.
Peace on Israel.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Mount Zion (har Tsiyon) originally referred to the Jebusite fortress David captured (2 Samuel 5:7) and came to represent the temple mount and, by extension, God's chosen dwelling place. The pilgrims approaching Jerusalem would see this mountain and understand the psalm's metaphor viscerally.
2. The word *saviv* ('around, surrounding') appears twice, creating a direct equation: mountains surround Jerusalem; the LORD surrounds his people. The temporal extension *me-attah ve-ad olam* ('from now and until forever') elevates the geographical observation into a permanent theological truth. The visible mountains will erode over eons; God's surrounding presence will not.

3. The word goral ('lot') refers to the system of land distribution by casting lots, as in Joshua 14-21. The 'lot of the righteous' is their divinely assigned inheritance. The threat is that foreign or wicked rule over this land will demoralize its inhabitants.
3. The phrase be-avlah ('toward injustice') uses avlah, a general term for moral crookedness or perversion of justice. The fear is not a specific sin but a general drift toward wrongdoing under pressure.
4. The prayer heitivah YHWH lattovim ('do good to the good') creates a wordplay between the verb hetiv ('do good') and the adjective tovim ('good'). The psalm asks for correspondence between character and consequence — let good people receive good treatment. The added qualification velisharim belibotam ('and to the upright in their hearts') specifies that the uprightness is internal, not merely behavioral.
5. The closing shalom al Yisrael functions as a liturgical formula, similar to 'amen.' It appears again at the end of Psalm 128, bracketing the central Songs of Ascents with a prayer for peace. The shift from warning to blessing is abrupt but deliberate — the psalm refuses to end on judgment.

126

Summary: *The community remembers a past restoration so stunning it felt like a dream — mouths filled with laughter, tongues with shouts of joy, even the surrounding nations acknowledging that the LORD had done great things. Then the psalm pivots to petition: restore us again, like desert streams suddenly filled with water. It closes with a promise that weeping will give way to harvest — those who go out crying, carrying seed, will return with joyful shouts, carrying sheaves.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This psalm lives in the tension between memory and hope. The first three verses celebrate a past deliverance so overwhelming that the people could scarcely believe it was real — hayinu ke-cholmim ('we were like dreamers'). But the psalm does not stay in the past. Verse 4 shifts abruptly to petition: shuvah YHWH et shevitenu ('restore our fortunes, LORD'). The past rescue is not enough; the present still needs God's intervention. The agricultural metaphor in verses 5-6 bridges the gap: sowing in tears guarantees a harvest of joy. The metaphor is not sentimental — it is agricultural realism. In the ancient Near East, planting seed meant giving up precious grain that could feed your family, trusting that the ground would return it multiplied. The tears are real loss; the harvest is real gain.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase be-shuv YHWH et shivat Tsiyon ('when the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion') has been traditionally linked to the return from Babylonian exile, but the Hebrew shivat could also be read as shevut ('captivity') — 'when the LORD returned the captives of Zion.' The psalm may predate or postdate the exile; the language is deliberately open enough to apply to any major restoration. The dream-like quality of the remembered deliverance suggests distance — either temporal or emotional — from the event.*

Connections: *The phrase hayinu ke-cholmim ('we were like dreamers') echoes the disorientation of Isaiah 29:7-8, where nations besieging Jerusalem vanish like a dream. The image of streams in the Negev (afikot ba-Negev) connects to Joel 3:18, where water flows from the house of the LORD. The sowing-and-reaping metaphor is developed extensively in Hosea 10:12 ('Sow righteousness, reap faithful love') and Galatians 6:7-9.*

¹A song of ascents.

When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like dreamers.

²Then our mouths were filled with laughter
and our tongues with shouts of joy.
Then they said among the nations,
"The LORD has done great things for these people."

³The LORD has done great things for us —
we are filled with joy.

4Restore our fortunes, LORD,
like streams in the Negev.

5Those who sow in tears
will reap with shouts of joy.

6The one who goes out weeping,
carrying the bag of seed,
will surely come back with shouts of joy,
carrying his sheaves.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The *ketiv-qere* variation between *shivat* and *shevut* has generated extensive scholarly discussion. *shivat* (from *shuv*, 'to return') suggests restored fortunes; *shevut* (from *shavah*, 'to take captive') suggests returned captives. Both readings are theologically coherent. We render 'restored the fortunes' as the broader term that encompasses both possibilities.
2. The double *az* ('then') creates a two-beat rhythm: then laughter, then recognition. The verb *yimmale* ('was filled') describes mouths overflowing — not polite smiles but uncontrollable laughter. The word *rinnah* ('joyful shouting, ringing cry') is loud, public, and physical. The nations' testimony — *higdil YHWH la'asot im elleh* ('the LORD has done great things with these') — is remarkable: even outsiders can see that this deliverance is God's work.
3. Israel takes the nations' words and makes them its own confession: *higdil YHWH la'asot immanu* ('the LORD has done great things with us'). The preposition *im* ('with') rather than *le* ('for') subtly implies partnership — God did great things with us, not merely to us. The response *hayinu semechim* ('we are/were joyful') uses the same root as Psalm 122:1 (*samachti*), linking pilgrimage joy to the joy of national restoration.
4. The *afiqim* ('channels, streambeds') of the Negev are visible features of the landscape a pilgrim would know. The image is not gentle rain but flash restoration — water appearing where there was none, life erupting from what appeared dead.
5. The contrast between *bedim'ah* ('in tears') and *berinnah* ('with joyful shouting') is absolute. The agricultural metaphor is not abstract: sowing required surrendering seed grain that could have fed the family. In a famine or hardship, planting was an act of faith — you gave up what you had in hope of a future harvest. The tears are the cost of the investment; the joy is the harvest's return.
6. The phrase *meshekh hazara* is unusual. *meshekh* may mean 'drawing, trailing' (from *mashakh*) or 'bag, pouch.' We render 'bag of seed' for clarity, understanding it as the container from which the sower draws seed to scatter. The image is of a farmer walking through a field, hand reaching into a bag, scattering grain through tears.

127

Summary: *A psalm of Solomon. Unless the LORD builds the house and guards the city, all human labor is futile. God gives to his beloved even in sleep. The psalm then shifts to children: sons are an inheritance from the LORD, like arrows in a warrior's hand. The man whose quiver is full of them will not be put to shame when he confronts his opponents at the city gate.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This is the only Song of Ascents attributed to Solomon, and the attribution is deeply fitting. Solomon built the temple — the house of the LORD — yet the psalm opens by declaring that unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labor in vain. If Solomon wrote or inspired this psalm, it is a confession that his greatest achievement depended entirely on God's initiative. The psalm contains one of the most radical statements about human effort in the entire Bible: it is useless (*shav*) to rise early, stay up late, and eat the bread of anxious toil, because God gives to his beloved in sleep. This is not an endorsement of laziness but a demolition of the illusion of self-sufficiency. The pivot to children in verses 3-5 is not a non sequitur — children are the ultimate example of something humans cannot manufacture by effort alone. They are *nachalat YHWH* ('an inheritance from the LORD'), a gift, not a product.*

Translation Friction: The relationship between the two halves of this psalm has puzzled interpreters. Verses 1-2 address the futility of human effort without God; verses 3-5 celebrate children as God's gift. The connection becomes clear when 'house' (bayit) is understood in its full Hebrew range: bayit means both a physical building and a family/dynasty. Solomon's bayit was both a temple and a royal house. The psalm says God must build both — the structure and the family line. Without God, neither architecture nor offspring accomplishes anything.

Connections: The Solomonic attribution connects directly to 2 Samuel 7, where God tells David that God will build David a 'house' (dynasty), inverting David's plan to build God a house (temple). The futility language (shav, 'in vain') echoes Ecclesiastes, also attributed to Solomon, which repeatedly declares human effort hevel ('vapor, breath'). The arrow imagery for children appears in Isaiah 49:2, where the Servant of the LORD is described as a polished arrow hidden in God's quiver.

1A song of ascents. Of Solomon.
Unless the LORD builds the house,
its builders labor over it in vain.
Unless the LORD guards the city,
the watchman stays awake in vain.

2It is useless for you to rise early,
to stay up late,
to eat the bread of anxious toil —
for he gives to his beloved in sleep.

3Look — children are an inheritance from the LORD;
the fruit of the womb is a reward.

4Like arrows in the hand of a warrior —
so are the children of one's youth.

5Happy is the man who has filled
his quiver with them.
They will not be put to shame
when they confront their enemies at the gate.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The word shav ('in vain, emptiness') appears twice, framing both human activities — building and guarding — as equally futile without God. shav does not mean 'bad' or 'sinful'; it means 'empty, without substance, accomplishing nothing.' The psalm does not condemn work but reframes its meaning.
1. The Solomonic attribution (li-Shelomoh) may indicate authorship, dedication, or association with the Solomonic wisdom tradition. Given the psalm's themes of building and God's sovereignty over human achievement, the connection to Solomon the temple-builder is theologically resonant regardless of the attribution's historical basis.
2. The word yedido ('his beloved') echoes the name Yedidyah ('beloved of the LORD'), the name God gave to Solomon through Nathan the prophet (2 Samuel 12:25). If this psalm is attributed to Solomon, the reference is deeply personal — Solomon himself is the beloved to whom God gives.
2. The phrase lechem ha-atsavim ('bread of anxious toil') describes food earned through stress and worry — bread that tastes like anxiety because it was produced by it.
3. The word nachalat ('inheritance, portion, possession') is covenant language — a nachalah is land or wealth received as a divine gift, not earned by labor. Calling children nachalat YHWH ('an inheritance from the LORD') puts them in the same category as the promised land: something God gives, not something humans produce by their own power. The parallel term sakhar ('reward, wages') reinforces this: children are God's payment, God's gift-in-return.
4. The phrase benei hane'urim ('children of youth') refers to children born when the parent is young and vigorous. The advantage is practical: these children will be adults while the parent is still active, providing support and advocacy (as verse 5 will specify).

5. The 'gate' (sha'ar) as a place of justice and public discourse appears throughout the Hebrew Bible (Ruth 4:1-11, Proverbs 31:23, Amos 5:15). Legal disputes, property transactions, and community leadership all centered at the city gate. Having sons present at the gate meant having advocates who could speak on your behalf, witness transactions, and defend family interests.

128

Summary: *A wisdom psalm that pronounces blessing on the person who fears the LORD and walks in his ways. The blessings are domestic and concrete: eating the fruit of your own labor, a wife like a fruitful vine in the inner rooms of your house, children like olive shoots around your table. The psalm extends the blessing outward from household to nation — may you see Jerusalem prosper, may you see your grandchildren, and may peace rest on Israel.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *After Psalm 127's declaration that human effort without God is futile, Psalm 128 describes what human effort with God looks like: it looks ordinary. The blessings here are not spectacular — no military victories, no prophetic visions, no miraculous interventions. They are a meal earned by your own hands, a spouse, children, and long life. The psalm sanctifies the mundane. The image of the wife as a *gefen poriyah* ('fruitful vine') in the inner rooms (*yarkete*) of the house and children as *shitilei zetim* ('olive shoots') around the table creates a picture of organic, living abundance. Vines and olives are the signature crops of the land of Israel; both take years to mature and produce for generations. The psalm says that a household rooted in the fear of the LORD grows like the land's most enduring plants.*

Translation Friction: *The psalm's domestic vision reflects ancient Israelite social structures — the male householder as the addressed audience, the wife described in relation to the home's interior. Modern readers may find this limiting. The Hebrew text, however, is not prescriptive about gender roles so much as descriptive of the ancient household as an economic and spiritual unit. The 'fear of the LORD' (*yirat YHWH*) that opens the psalm is the foundation — everything that follows is presented as the fruit of that posture, not as a guaranteed formula.*

Connections: *This psalm pairs with Psalm 127 as a wisdom diptych on household and family. Where 127 warns against self-reliance, 128 describes the blessings of God-centered living. The vine and olive imagery echoes Psalm 52:8 ('I am like a green olive tree in the house of God') and Hosea 14:6-7 (Israel's restored beauty compared to olive trees and vines). The closing *shalom al Yisrael* matches Psalm 125:5 exactly.*

¹A song of ascents.

Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD,
who walks in his ways.

²You will eat the fruit of your own labor —
blessed are you, and it will go well for you.

³Your wife will be like a fruitful vine
in the inner rooms of your house;
your children like olive shoots
around your table.

⁴Look — this is how the man is blessed
who fears the LORD.

⁵May the LORD bless you from Zion;
may you see Jerusalem's prosperity
all the days of your life.

6May you see your children's children.
Peace on Israel.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The beatitude ashrei ('blessed, happy, fortunate') opens this psalm as it opens Psalm 1, creating a wisdom-literature frame. The phrase kol yere YHWH ('everyone who fears the LORD') is universal — the blessing is not limited to priests, kings, or prophets but available to anyone who lives in reverent awareness of God. The parallel haholekh bidrakav ('who walks in his ways') translates fear into action: to fear God is to walk God's path.
2. The blessing of eating one's own labor directly counters the covenant curses of Deuteronomy 28:30-33 and Leviticus 26:16, where enemy nations consume what Israel plants. To eat your own food in peace is itself a theological statement: the curse has been reversed.
3. The word yarkete ('sides, recesses, innermost parts') appears in other contexts to describe the innermost parts of a cave (1 Samuel 24:3) or the far reaches of a territory (Isaiah 14:13). In the domestic setting, it indicates the protected interior of the house — the private quarters rather than the public-facing areas.
4. The particle hinneh ('look') draws attention to the preceding verses as evidence: this domestic abundance is what blessing looks like when it flows from the fear of the LORD. The psalm presents no extraordinary gifts — only a working household, food, a spouse, and children. The implication is that the ordinary, when rooted in God, is the blessing.
5. The blessing now radiates outward from the household to the city. The source of blessing is mi-Tsiyon ('from Zion') — the temple mount, God's dwelling place. The prayer u-re'eh be-tuv Yerushalayim ('and may you see the good/prosperity of Jerusalem') expresses the hope that the individual will live long enough and in enough peace to witness the city flourishing. Personal blessing and national blessing are linked: your household's abundance is part of Jerusalem's abundance.
6. The final blessing is generational: re'eh vanim le-vanekha ('see children belonging to your children') — grandchildren are the visible proof that God's blessing extends beyond one lifetime. The closing formula shalom al Yisrael ('peace on Israel') matches Psalm 125:5, framing these central Songs of Ascents with an identical prayer. The movement from individual fear of God (v. 1) to national peace (v. 6) traces the psalm's conviction that personal faithfulness contributes to collective flourishing.

129

Summary: *Israel looks back on a lifetime of oppression — attacked repeatedly since its youth — yet declares that the oppressors have not prevailed. The psalm uses a brutal agricultural image: they plowed across my back, cutting long furrows. But the LORD, who is righteous, cut the ropes of the wicked. The psalm then turns to imprecation: may all who hate Zion be put to shame and become like grass on a rooftop — sprouting quickly but withering before it can be gathered, with no one offering a blessing to the harvesters.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The image of plowing on a back (al gabi charshu chorshim, 'upon my back the plowers plowed') is among the most visceral in the Psalter. The verb charash ('to plow') describes cutting furrows in soil with a blade — applied to a human back, the image is of skin laid open in long, parallel wounds. The 'furrows' (ma'anitam, from ma'anah, 'furrow') are deep and extended: he'erikhu ('they made long'). This is not a quick blow but sustained, methodical abuse. Yet the psalm does not wallow — it pivots immediately to God's intervention: YHWH tsaddiq qitssets avot resha'im ('the LORD is righteous; he has cut the cords of the wicked'). The same agricultural world provides the rescue: God cuts the ropes that bound the plow-animal to its burden.*

Translation Friction: *The imprecatory section (vv. 5-8) prays for the shame and withering of Zion's enemies. The grass-on-the-rooftop image is oddly specific: ancient flat roofs accumulated thin soil in which seeds would sprout after rain but, lacking depth, the growth would wither before harvest. No reaper would bother to gather it, and no one passing by would offer the standard harvest blessing ('The blessing of the LORD be upon you'). The enemies are denied not only success but even the courtesy of a blessing. This level of detailed malediction reflects real trauma — the psalm's anger is proportional to the plowing of verse 3.*

Connections: *The image of Israel's suffering from its 'youth' (mine'urai) echoes Hosea 2:15 and Jeremiah 2:2, where Israel's youth refers to the exodus and wilderness period. The plowing image anticipates Isaiah 51:23, where oppressors say to Israel, 'Lie down so we may walk over you.' The rooftop grass appears in 2 Kings 19:26 / Isaiah 37:27 in the same context of enemies that wither. The harvest-blessing formula in verse 8 echoes Ruth 2:4, where Boaz greets his reapers.*

¹A song of ascents.
 "They have attacked me often since my youth" —
 let Israel say it —

²"They have attacked me often since my youth —
 but they have not overcome me."

³Plowers plowed across my back;
 they cut their furrows long.

⁴The LORD is righteous;
 he has cut the ropes of the wicked.

⁵May all who hate Zion
 be put to shame and driven back.

⁶May they be like grass on the rooftops
 that withers before it can be pulled up,

⁷that never fills the reaper's hand
 or the binder's arms.

⁸And no passerby will say,
 "The blessing of the LORD be upon you;
 we bless you in the name of the LORD."

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb tsararuni ('they have attacked me, they have oppressed me, they have been hostile to me') is from tsarar ('to bind, to press, to be hostile'). The word mine'urai ('from my youth') personifies Israel as a single individual whose life story is one of repeated assault. Israel's 'youth' likely refers to the Egyptian bondage or the early settlement period. The imperative yomar na Yisrael ('let Israel say') invites the congregation to take up the confession together, as in Psalm 124:1.
2. The repetition of rabbat tsararuni mine'urai from verse 1 creates emphasis through restatement, but the second line adds the decisive contrast: gam lo yakhlu li ('yet they have not prevailed against me'). The verb yakhal ('to be able, to prevail, to overcome') is in the perfect tense — they tried and they failed. The gam ('yet, also, even') introduces the counter-statement with force: despite everything, despite the long history of attack, they did not succeed.
3. The phrase al gabbi ('upon my back') uses the singular possessive, maintaining the personification of Israel as a single body. The plowing image may also carry overtones of enslavement — in Egypt, Israelites were forced to labor in the fields, and here the oppressors turn Israel's own body into the field.
4. The declaration YHWH tsaddiq ('the LORD is righteous') is judicial: God has judged the situation and acted. The verb qitsets ('he has cut, he has chopped') is forceful — it describes cutting through with decisive action. The avot ('ropes, cords, thick bindings') are the harness ropes that bound the plow-team to the plow. God severed the connection between the oppressors and their instrument of torture. The agricultural metaphor is sustained: the plowers plowed, but God cut their rigging. The plow goes dead in the furrow.
5. The imprecation begins. The verb yevoshu ('may they be shamed') and yissogu achor ('may they be turned backward, may they retreat') are jussive forms expressing a wish. The shame (bosh) is public humiliation — the exposure of failed ambition. Being turned backward (achor) is the opposite of advancing; the enemies are repelled. The phrase son'ei Tsiyon ('haters of Zion') defines the target: those who oppose God's chosen city and, by extension, God's people.
6. Ancient Israelite houses had flat roofs made of packed earth over wooden beams. Rain would cause seeds trapped in the thin soil layer to sprout, but with no depth of earth and full exposure to sun, the growth would wither almost immediately. The word shalaf ('to pull up, to draw out') suggests the grass dies before anyone could even grasp it to harvest. The image is of growth that promises nothing and delivers nothing — a perfect metaphor for the enemies' ambitions.
7. The image continues: this rooftop grass is so sparse and worthless that the qotser ('reaper, harvester') cannot fill his hand (kappo) with it, and the me'ammer ('binder, sheaf-gatherer') cannot fill his lap or arms (chitsno). The harvest metaphor from Psalm 126:6 (the joyful reaper carrying sheaves)

is inverted: here there are no sheaves, no harvest, no joy. The enemies produce nothing worth gathering.

8. The harvest blessing formula is attested in Ruth 2:4, where Boaz arrives at his field and greets his workers with YHWH immakhem ('the LORD be with you'), and they respond YHWH yevarekekha ('the LORD bless you'). The psalm's quotation of a nearly identical formula shows how deeply worship was woven into daily agricultural practice. To be denied this greeting is to be cut off from the rhythm of covenantal life.

130

Summary: *From the depths, the psalmist cries out to the LORD. If God kept a record of sins, no one could stand. But with God there is forgiveness — and this forgiveness produces reverence, not presumption. The psalmist waits for the LORD with an intensity greater than watchmen waiting for dawn. The psalm ends by urging all Israel to hope in the LORD, because with him there is faithful love and full redemption, and he will redeem Israel from all its sins.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This is one of the seven traditional Penitential Psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143) and one of the most theologically dense compositions in the Psalter. In eight verses, it moves from the abyss to redemption. The theological centerpiece is verses 3-4: if God kept a record of iniquities, no one would survive the audit — but with God there is selichah ('forgiveness'), and this forgiveness is the basis for fear, not its removal. The logic is counterintuitive: forgiveness produces reverence (lema'an tivvare, 'so that you may be feared'). The psalm understands that a God who only judged would inspire terror, not worship. A God who forgives inspires awe — the profound, sustained reverence of someone who has been pardoned when they deserved to be condemned. The watchman metaphor in verses 5-6 captures the posture: waiting in darkness, utterly confident that morning will come, yet unable to rush it.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase mi-ma'amaqim ('out of the depths') has been variously interpreted as literal danger (drowning, imprisonment), metaphorical spiritual crisis, or the psalmist's sense of distance from God. The 'depths' (ma'amaqim) are related to the abyss — the deep waters of chaos that threaten to engulf. The psalm does not specify what put the psalmist in the depths, which makes it universally applicable. Martin Luther considered this psalm one of the four 'Pauline Psalms' because of its doctrine of grace: forgiveness is God's initiative, not earned by human merit.*

Connections: *The cry from the depths echoes Jonah 2:2 ('out of the belly of Sheol I cried') and Psalm 69:2 ('I have come into the depths of the waters'). The assertion that no one can stand before God's scrutiny parallels Psalm 143:2 ('no living person is righteous before you') and anticipates Paul's argument in Romans 3:20. The phrase chesed ('faithful love') in verse 7 connects to the great chesed declarations of Exodus 34:6-7. The waiting-for-dawn metaphor recurs in Isaiah 21:11-12 ('Watchman, what is left of the night?').*

¹A song of ascents.

Out of the depths I cry to you, LORD.

²Lord, hear my voice;

let your ears be attentive

to the sound of my pleas for mercy.

³If you kept a record of sins, Yah —

Lord, who could stand?

⁴But with you there is forgiveness,

so that you may be revered.

⁵I wait for the LORD;

my whole being waits,

and in his word I hope.

6My whole being waits for the Lord
more than watchmen wait for morning —
more than watchmen wait for morning.

7Hope in the LORD, Israel,
for with the LORD there is faithful love,
and with him there is redemption in abundance.

8And he will redeem Israel
from all its sins.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The noun *ma'amaqim* appears only here and in Psalm 69:2, 14 and Ezekiel 27:34. In every case it describes overwhelming, threatening depths — waters that swallow, darkness that consumes. The Songs of Ascents are pilgrimage songs of going up; this psalm begins at the lowest point, making the ascent all the more dramatic.
2. The address shifts from YHWH (v. 1) to Adonai ('Lord, Master'), the title used when the divine name was considered too sacred to pronounce. The request *shim'ah be-qoli* ('hear my voice') is followed by the more specific *tiheyinah oznekha qashshuvot* ('let your ears be attentive'). The word *qashshuvot* ('attentive, listening closely') describes focused, deliberate hearing — not just registering sound but paying attention. The *tachanunai* ('my pleas for mercy, my supplications') derives from *chanan* ('to be gracious'), connecting to the grace-theology that runs through the psalm.
3. The verb *tishmor* ('you would keep, you would guard') is the same root (*shamar*) that dominates Psalm 121, where God's keeping is protective. Here the same verb takes on a forensic meaning: to keep a record, to preserve evidence. The God who guards Israel could also guard a ledger of sins — but chooses not to.
4. The word *selichah* ('forgiveness') appears only three times in the Hebrew Bible as a noun (here, Nehemiah 9:17, Daniel 9:9). In every occurrence, it describes God's forgiveness — never human forgiveness of another human. This is a distinctly divine act.
4. We render *tivvare* as 'revered' rather than 'feared' to capture the nuance. The fear here is not terror at punishment but profound awe at grace. The pardoned sinner does not flee from God but draws closer in reverent amazement.
5. The double statement *qivviti YHWH qivvetah nafshi* ('I wait for the LORD, my soul waits') intensifies the claim: not just the mind or the will but the *nefesh* — the entire self — is engaged in waiting. The verb *qavah* ('to wait, to hope, to look eagerly for') implies taut expectation, like a rope stretched tight. The phrase *ve-lidvaro hochalti* ('and for his word I hope') adds a specific object: the psalmist waits not just for God in general but for God's word — a promise, an answer, a declaration.
6. The *shomerim* ('watchmen') connect back to the *shamar* root that dominates Psalm 121. But here the watchmen are not guarding — they are waiting. Their job is to endure the night and announce the morning. The psalmist's soul does the same: endures the darkness of the depths (v. 1) and watches for God's arrival.
7. We render *chesed* as 'faithful love' throughout The Covenant Rendering. The word resists single-word translation: it encompasses loyalty, kindness, mercy, covenant faithfulness, steadfast love, and committed devotion. 'Faithful love' captures both the emotional warmth (love) and the covenantal reliability (faithful).
8. The verb *yifdeh* ('he will redeem') is in the imperfect tense, indicating future or ongoing action — this redemption is not only a past event but a continuing and future reality. The psalm ends not with a completed action but with a promise that stretches forward: God will keep redeeming.

131

Summary: A Song of Ascents attributed to David. In just three verses, the psalmist renounces ambition, pride, and intellectual presumption, choosing instead a posture of quiet trust. The central image is a weaned child resting against its mother — no longer nursing, no longer demanding, simply at rest. The psalm concludes with a call for Israel to adopt the same posture toward the LORD.

*What Makes This Remarkable: This is one of the shortest psalms in the Psalter, yet it accomplishes something almost no other psalm attempts: it describes the interior discipline of humility not as self-abasement but as chosen contentment. The weaned child (*gamal*) is the key — not an infant still feeding, still needy, still crying for milk, but a child who has moved past the stage of demand. The psalmist does not say 'I*

have been humbled' (passive, by circumstance) but 'I have leveled and quieted my soul' (active, by choice). This is willed serenity, not resigned passivity. In three verses, David maps the entire journey from renunciation of pride to active trust.

Translation Friction: *The verb shivviti ('I have leveled, smoothed, made even') in verse 2 is unusual. It does not mean 'I have behaved myself' as the KJV renders it. The root shavah means 'to be level, equal, smooth' — the psalmist has flattened the turbulence of his soul the way one smooths a field. The weaned child image is also more culturally loaded than modern readers realize: weaning in ancient Israel typically occurred at age three, so this is not a newborn but a toddler who has passed through the difficult transition of separation from the breast and now rests without demand.*

Connections: *The Song of Ascents collection (Psalms 120-134) were sung by pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem. Psalm 131 sits between Psalm 130's cry from the depths and Psalm 132's grand Davidic covenant psalm, making it a quiet hinge — the pilgrim who has cried out now rests before approaching the promises of God to David's house. The weaned child image resonates with Isaiah 28:9 ('those weaned from milk, drawn from the breast') and Jesus' teaching that one must become like a child to enter the kingdom (Matthew 18:3).*

¹A song of ascents. Of David.

LORD, my heart is not lifted up,
and my eyes are not raised high.
I do not walk among things too great
or too wondrous for me.

²Instead, I have leveled and quieted my soul
like a weaned child with its mother.
Like a weaned child, so is my soul within me.

³Let Israel wait for the LORD
from now until forever.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb gavah means 'to be high, exalted, proud' and when applied to the heart describes internal arrogance — a self-assessment that exceeds reality. The eyes being 'raised' (ramu) is the outward expression of the same posture: looking down on others, setting one's gaze on things above one's station.
1. The word niflaot ('wondrous things') is a niph'al participle from pala ('to be extraordinary, surpassing, too difficult'). It is the same root used for God's wonders in the Exodus narratives. The psalmist is not rejecting intellectual curiosity but acknowledging that some realities belong to God alone — echoing Deuteronomy 29:29, 'the hidden things belong to the LORD our God.'
2. The KJV's 'I have behaved and quieted myself' misses the force of shivviti, which does not mean 'to behave' but 'to level, make even, smooth.' The piel form intensifies the action: the psalmist has actively worked to flatten the uneven terrain of his inner life.
2. Ancient Israelite children were typically weaned between ages two and three (cf. 1 Samuel 1:22-24, where Hannah waits until Samuel is weaned before bringing him to the temple). The gamal is therefore not an infant but a young child who has passed through a significant developmental transition — from dependence on the breast to the ability to be with the mother without needing to feed.
3. The verb yachel (from yachal) means 'to wait, to hope, to expect' and carries more active weight than English 'hope.' It implies endurance and orientation — the one who yachels is facing toward the object of hope and willing to wait as long as necessary. This is the same verb used in Psalm 130:5, the preceding psalm: 'I wait for the LORD, my soul waits.'

132

Summary: *A Song of Ascents that recounts David's oath to find a resting place for the ark of the LORD and God's answering oath to establish David's dynasty forever. The psalm divides into two halves: David's vow to God (vv. 1-10) and God's vow to David (vv. 11-18). It is the fullest poetic expression of the Davidic covenant outside of 2 Samuel 7.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This psalm is built on the architecture of reciprocal oaths. David swears an oath to God (vv. 2-5) and God swears an oath to David (vv. 11-12). The structure creates a mirror: human faithfulness answered by divine faithfulness, human initiative met by divine promise. But the asymmetry is crucial — David's oath is conditional on effort ('I will not enter my house... I will not give sleep to my eyes'), while God's oath is conditional on obedience ('If your sons keep my covenant'). The psalm also resolves the tension between the movable ark and the permanent temple by showing that God's choice of Zion is His own act of desire: 'The LORD has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His dwelling' (v. 13). God is not housed because David decided to build; God dwells in Zion because He wanted to.*

Translation Friction: *Verse 6 contains a geographical puzzle: 'We heard of it in Ephrathah; we found it in the fields of Jaar.' Ephrathah may refer to Bethlehem (David's hometown) or to the region around Kiriath-Jearim where the ark rested for twenty years (1 Samuel 7:1-2). 'Fields of Jaar' (sedei ya'ar) appears to be a shortened form of Kiriath-Jearim ('city of forests'). The verse compresses the entire history of the lost and recovered ark into a single couplet. The conditional clause in verse 12 — 'if your sons keep my covenant' — introduces a tension with the unconditional promise of 2 Samuel 7:14-16, where God says He will discipline David's sons but never remove His faithful love. The psalm holds both the conditional and the unconditional together without resolving them.*

Connections: *This psalm is the poetic counterpart to 2 Samuel 7 (the Davidic covenant narrative) and 1 Chronicles 28:2 (David's speech about building the temple). The ark's journey from Kiriath-Jearim to Jerusalem is narrated in 2 Samuel 6. The language of verse 8 — 'Arise, LORD, to your resting place, you and the ark of your strength' — echoes Numbers 10:35-36, Moses' cry when the ark set out. The promise that David's lamp will never be extinguished (v. 17) appears in 1 Kings 11:36 and 2 Kings 8:19. The psalm is used liturgically in 2 Chronicles 6:41-42 at the dedication of Solomon's temple.*

¹A song of ascents.

Remember, LORD, for David's sake
all his hardship.

²How he swore to the LORD,
made a vow to the Mighty One of Jacob:

³"I will not enter the tent of my house
or climb onto the couch of my bed.

⁴I will not give sleep to my eyes
or slumber to my eyelids,

⁵until I find a place for the LORD,
a dwelling for the Mighty One of Jacob."

⁶We heard of it in Ephrathah;
we found it in the fields of Jaar.

⁷Let us go to His dwelling places;
let us bow down at His footstool.

⁸Arise, LORD, to your resting place —
you and the ark of your strength.

⁹Let your priests be clothed in righteousness,
and let your faithful ones shout for joy.

¹⁰For the sake of your servant David,
do not turn away the face of your anointed one.

¹¹The LORD swore to David —
a firm truth from which He will not turn back:
"From the fruit of your body
I will set someone on your throne.

¹²If your sons keep my covenant
and my decrees that I will teach them,
then their sons also, forever,
will sit on your throne."

¹³For the LORD has chosen Zion;
He has desired it as His dwelling.

¹⁴"This is my resting place forever.
Here I will dwell, for I have desired it.

¹⁵I will richly bless her provisions;
her poor I will satisfy with bread.

¹⁶Her priests I will clothe with salvation,
and her faithful ones will shout aloud for joy.

¹⁷There I will cause a horn to sprout for David;
I have prepared a lamp for my anointed one.

¹⁸His enemies I will clothe with shame,
but upon him his crown will shine.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The word *unnoto* (from *anah*, 'to be afflicted, humbled') could also be translated 'his self-denial' or 'his devotion through hardship.' Some scholars connect it to the vow-making process itself — the hardships David voluntarily imposed on himself in pursuit of housing the ark. The KJV's 'afflictions' captures the suffering but misses the voluntary, self-imposed dimension.
2. *Avir Ya'aqov* ('Mighty One of Jacob') appears in Genesis 49:24, Isaiah 1:24, 49:26, and 60:16. The word *avir* means 'mighty one, bull, champion' — it evokes strength and reliability. By using this patriarchal title rather than simply 'the LORD,' the psalm anchors David's vow in the deep history of God's relationship with Israel's ancestors.
3. The oath formula *im* ('if') in Hebrew oaths functions as a strong negative: 'I will certainly not...' The escalating parallelism — 'tent of my house' / 'couch of my bed' — moves from the general (entering the house) to the specific (getting into bed). David vows to deny himself domestic comfort until he has secured a home for the ark.
4. The parallelism moves from 'sleep' (*shenah*) to 'slumber' (*tenumah*), from 'eyes' (*einai*) to 'eyelids' (*af'appai*). The language is nearly identical to Proverbs 6:4, where the sluggard is told to deny himself rest until he has escaped his debt. David applies the urgency of a debtor to the project of housing God's ark — rest is impossible until the task is accomplished.

5. The plural *mishkanot* ('dwellings') is used for poetic fullness rather than to indicate multiple locations. The singular *mishkan* is the standard term for the tabernacle in the wilderness narratives (Exodus 25:9). Here the plural elevates the concept — a dwelling worthy of the Mighty One of Jacob.
6. The identification of Ephrathah is debated. It most likely refers to the district including both Bethlehem (David's origin, cf. Micah 5:2) and Kiriath-Jearim (where the ark rested). *Sedei ya'ar* ('fields of Jaar/forest') appears to be a shortened poetic form of Kiriath-Jearim. The verse traces the arc from hearing about the ark (in the region of David's youth) to finding it (in the fields near Kiriath-Jearim).
7. The 'footstool' (*hadom raglav*) is the ark of the covenant, understood as the base of God's invisible throne. The cherubim atop the ark form the seat; the ark itself is where God's feet rest. This image appears in 1 Chronicles 28:2, where David says, 'I had it in my heart to build a house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the LORD, for the footstool of our God.' The invitation to 'bow down' (*nishtachaveh*) at the footstool is an invitation to worship at the very point where heaven meets earth.
8. This verse is quoted almost verbatim in 2 Chronicles 6:41, where Solomon speaks it at the dedication of the temple. The movement from Numbers 10:35 (the ark arises to lead Israel through the wilderness) to Psalm 132:8 (the ark arises to find its permanent home) maps the entire arc of Israel's journey from Sinai to Zion.
9. The priests are 'clothed' (*yilbeshu*) in *tsedeq* ('righteousness') — not garments but character. The parallel term *chasidekha* ('your faithful ones, your devoted ones') derives from *chesed* and describes those bound to God by mutual loyalty. The verse pairs institutional worship (priests) with communal devotion (the faithful). Both are essential to the scene of God's arrival at His resting place.
10. The word *mashiach* ('anointed one, messiah') here refers to the reigning king of David's line. Every Davidic king was God's *mashiach* — anointed with oil as a sign of divine selection. The later development of 'Messiah' as a title for an eschatological deliverer grows out of passages exactly like this one, where the promise to David's line carries the weight of God's eternal commitment.
11. The phrase *nishba YHWH* ('the LORD swore') is remarkable — God binds Himself by oath. In Hebrews 6:13-17, this divine self-binding is cited as the ultimate guarantee: since God can swear by no one greater, He swears by Himself. The word *emet* ('truth') here functions almost as an adverb: God swore truly, firmly, reliably.
12. The tension between the unconditional promise of verse 11 and the conditional clause of verse 12 is one of the great puzzles of Davidic covenant theology. In 2 Samuel 7:14-16, God says He will discipline David's sons but never remove His *chesed*. Here, the continuation of the throne depends on covenant-keeping. The resolution may be that the dynasty itself is unconditional (it will eventually produce the ultimate king) while individual reigns within it are conditional on faithfulness.
13. The verb *ivvah* (from *avah*) is the same verb used for human desire and appetite. Applying it to God is anthropomorphic but deliberate — the psalm wants the reader to understand that God's presence in Zion is not obligation but desire. He chose because He wanted to dwell there.
14. The adverbial phrase *adei ad* ('forever and ever') is one of the strongest temporal expressions in Hebrew, denoting permanence without limit. When God says 'this is my rest forever,' the claim transcends any particular structure — the first temple, the second temple. The psalm makes a theological claim about Zion that outlasts every building erected on it.
15. The infinitive absolute construction *barekh abarekh* ('I will surely bless, I will richly bless') is the same grammatical form God uses in blessing Abraham (Genesis 22:17). It signals a divine commitment of the highest order. The focus on feeding the poor connects Zion theology to social justice — God's dwelling place must be a place where the hungry eat.
16. The parallel between verse 9 (the psalmist's prayer) and verse 16 (God's answer) reveals the psalm's structure of call and response. The community asks for *tsedeq* ('righteousness'); God gives *yeshu'ah* ('salvation'). The community asks for joy; God gives intensified joy. In every case, God's answer exceeds the request.
17. The verb *atsmiyach* ('I will cause to sprout') is the same root as *tsemach*, the word Jeremiah (23:5) and Zechariah (3:8, 6:12) use for the messianic 'Branch' — the righteous descendant who will sprout from David's line. This verse is one of the roots of that later messianic terminology.
17. The 'lamp' (*ner*) as a symbol of dynastic survival appears repeatedly in the books of Kings. When God tears the kingdom from Solomon, He leaves one tribe 'so that David my servant may always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem' (1 Kings 11:36). The lamp is the visible sign of God's ongoing commitment to the Davidic line.
18. The verb *yatsits* ('to blossom, shine') applied to the crown is unusual and vivid. It connects the crown to the sprouting horn of verse 17 — both images are organic and living, suggesting a dynasty that is not merely maintained but flourishing. The choice of this verb transforms the crown from a static object to a living symbol of divine favor.

133

Summary: *A Song of Ascents attributed to David. This brief psalm celebrates the goodness of brothers dwelling together in unity, illustrating it with two vivid images: precious oil flowing down Aaron's beard and the dew of Hermon descending on the mountains of Zion. It concludes with the declaration that where such unity exists, the LORD commands blessing — life forever.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The psalm's two similes seem strange to modern readers — anointing oil and mountain dew — but both are images of downward flow, of something precious descending from above to cover what is below. The oil flows from Aaron's head down his beard to the collar of his robes; the dew descends from towering Hermon to the hills of Zion. Unity is not something people generate from within but something that descends upon them from a higher source. The psalm is also remarkable for its brevity and compression: in three verses it moves from observation ('how good') to illustration (oil and dew) to theological declaration (the LORD commands blessing there). The word sham ('there') in verse 3 is the hinge — wherever brothers dwell together, that is where God commands life.*

Translation Friction: *The geography of verse 3 is deliberately impossible: Mount Hermon is in the far north of Israel, over 100 miles from Zion. Hermon's dew cannot literally fall on Zion. The psalm is not describing meteorology but theology — the refreshing abundance of the north (Hermon, over 9,000 feet, generating massive dew) is imagined as descending on the holy mountain. The impossible geography creates a poetic hyperbole: unity is so precious that it is as if the richest dew in the land fell on the most sacred mountain. The anointing oil image references the high priestly consecration of Exodus 29:7 and Leviticus 8:12, connecting brotherly unity to the holiness of the priesthood.*

Connections: *The oil imagery echoes the consecration of Aaron in Exodus 29:7 and Leviticus 8:12. The phrase 'how good' (mah tov) echoes Genesis 1, where God repeatedly declares creation 'good' (tov). The concept of brothers dwelling together has legal resonance — Deuteronomy 25:5 uses the same phrase (achim yoshevim yachdav) for brothers living on the same family property, suggesting that the psalm's 'unity' has concrete, practical, not merely spiritual, meaning. The 'dew of Hermon' connects to the abundance imagery throughout the Psalms of Ascent, where Zion is the destination of blessing.*

¹A song of ascents. Of David.

How good and how pleasant it is
when brothers dwell together.

²It is like fine oil on the head,
running down on the beard —
Aaron's beard —
running down to the collar of his robes.

³Like the dew of Hermon
running down on the mountains of Zion —
for there the LORD has commanded the blessing:
life forever.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The phrase achim yoshevim yachdav ('brothers dwelling together') appears in Deuteronomy 25:5 in the law of levirate marriage, where it describes brothers living on the same family estate. The psalm may originally have had this concrete, property-based meaning — the goodness of family members who share an inheritance without dividing it. The Psalms of Ascent expand this to the national level: Israel as brothers gathering together at Zion.

2. The anointing oil recipe is given in Exodus 30:22-33: myrrh, cinnamon, cane, cassia, and olive oil. It was sacred — no one could make it for ordinary use. By comparing unity to this oil, the psalm elevates brotherly solidarity to the level of holy consecration. The phrase *pi middotav* ('the mouth/opening of his garments') refers to the neck opening of the priestly robe, not the hem. The oil reaches the collar, not the feet — the image is of total coverage of the upper body.
3. The verb *tsivvah* ('commanded') applied to blessing is unusual and powerful. God commands armies, commands the sea, commands angels — and here He commands blessing to fall on the place where brothers live in unity. The blessing is not optional or hoped for but decreed.
3. The phrase *chayyim ad ha-olam* ('life until forever') is the psalm's climax. It transcends ordinary blessing (crops, safety, children) and reaches toward the ultimate gift. In the context of the Psalms of Ascent, pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem are told that their destination — the place where Israel gathers as one — is the place where God commands eternal life.

134

Summary: *The final Song of Ascents. In just three verses, the psalm calls on the servants of the LORD who stand in the temple at night to lift their hands and bless God, then pronounces a blessing from Zion back upon the worshiper. It is both the conclusion of the pilgrimage collection and a liturgical exchange between the arriving pilgrims and the temple ministers.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 134 closes the Songs of Ascent (120-134) with an exchange of blessing. The pilgrims have arrived. The journey that began in Psalm 120 with distress among hostile neighbors ends here in the temple courts at night. The psalm's structure is a call and response: verses 1-2 are the pilgrims' call to the night-shift priests and Levites ('Bless the LORD!'), and verse 3 is the priests' answering benediction ('May the LORD bless you from Zion'). Blessing flows in both directions — upward from people to God and downward from God through the priests to the people. The brevity is itself meaningful: after fifteen psalms of journey, longing, trust, and arrival, the final word is simply 'bless' — repeated three times in three verses.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase *omdim be-veit YHWH ba-leilot* ('standing in the house of the LORD at night') raises questions about nighttime temple worship. While the regular sacrificial schedule was centered on morning and evening, 1 Chronicles 9:33 mentions Levitical singers who served 'day and night,' and Psalm 42:8 speaks of God's song 'in the night.' The night watch was a real feature of temple life, not merely poetic atmosphere. The night setting also creates theological resonance: even in darkness, the servants of the LORD stand and bless.*

Connections: *As the final Song of Ascents, Psalm 134 echoes and resolves themes from the entire collection. The 'lifting of hands' (*se'u yedeikhem*) toward the sanctuary recalls Psalm 121:1 ('I lift my eyes to the hills'). The blessing from Zion echoes Psalm 128:5 ('May the LORD bless you from Zion'). The title *oseh shamayim va-arets* ('maker of heaven and earth') appeared in Psalm 121:2 and Psalm 124:8, forming an inclusio that brackets the entire collection. The pilgrimage that began with a cry for help from the maker of heaven and earth ends with a blessing from the same maker.*

¹A song of ascents.
Come, bless the LORD,
all you servants of the LORD
who stand in the house of the LORD at night.

²Lift your hands toward the sanctuary
and bless the LORD.

³May the LORD bless you from Zion —
the maker of heaven and earth.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The phrase *avdei YHWH* ('servants of the LORD') can refer broadly to all worshipers or specifically to the Levitical temple staff. In this context, the night setting and the standing in the house of the LORD point to the temple ministers. The verb *omdim* ('standing') is a technical term for priestly service — to 'stand before the LORD' means to serve in an official capacity (Deuteronomy 10:8).
2. The ambiguity of *qodesh* ('holiness' or 'the holy place/sanctuary') is likely intentional. The lifted hands are directed toward the sacred space (the inner sanctuary where God's presence dwells) and the act itself is sacred (performed in holiness). Hebrew poets often exploit the double meaning of spatial and qualitative terms.
3. The phrase *oseh shamayim va-arets* ('maker of heaven and earth') forms an inclusio with Psalm 121:2 and Psalm 124:8, bracketing the Songs of Ascent. The God who helped the pilgrim start the journey is the same God who blesses at the destination. This structural repetition is deliberate and marks the collection as a unified literary whole.
3. The shift from plural address in verses 1-2 (*barekhu*, 'bless,' plural) to singular in verse 3 (*yevarekekha*, 'may he bless you,' singular) may reflect a liturgical practice: the congregation calls out together, and the priest pronounces the blessing on each individual worshiper.

135

Summary: *A grand hymn of praise that draws together threads from across the Hebrew Bible. The psalm opens and closes with Hallelujah, calls on the temple servants to praise the LORD's name, recounts His sovereignty over nature and His mighty acts in the Exodus and conquest, mocks the impotence of idols, and concludes with a cascade of blessings from Zion. It is a mosaic psalm — nearly every line echoes or quotes another biblical text.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 135 is one of the most heavily allusive psalms in the Psalter. It borrows from Exodus 15 (the Song of the Sea), Deuteronomy 32 (the Song of Moses), Psalm 115 (the idol polemic), Psalm 134 (the blessing from Zion), and Jeremiah 10 (the weather theophany). This is not plagiarism but liturgical art — the psalm weaves Israel's entire theological tradition into a single hymn, creating a tapestry of received language that a worshiping community would recognize line by line. The idol section (vv. 15-18) is nearly identical to Psalm 115:4-8, reinforcing the contrast between the living God who acts in history and the dead gods who cannot move, speak, or see.*

Translation Friction: *The statement that God 'does whatever He pleases' (v. 6) and the celebration of military conquest (vv. 10-12) present the psalm's God as an unconstrained sovereign who acts unilaterally. The killing of Sihon and Og (vv. 10-11) is celebrated without moral qualification — this is conquest theology in its purest form. Modern readers must reckon with the fact that the psalm praises the same God for making lightning and for destroying nations, holding both in a single breath of worship. The psalm does not apologize for this; it asserts that God's sovereignty over weather and God's sovereignty over history are the same sovereignty.*

Connections: *Verses 15-18 closely parallel Psalm 115:4-8 (the idol polemic). Verse 7 echoes Jeremiah 10:13 and 51:16 (God's control of weather). Verses 8-12 retell the Exodus and conquest narratives from Exodus 7-12 and Numbers 21. Verse 4 echoes Deuteronomy 7:6 (Israel's election). The opening 'Hallelujah' and closing 'Hallelujah' frame it as a complete liturgical unit. The blessing from Zion in verse 21 connects directly to Psalm 134:3, making Psalm 135 a natural continuation of the Songs of Ascent.*

¹Hallelujah!

Praise the name of the LORD;

praise Him, you servants of the LORD,

²you who stand in the house of the LORD,

within the courts of the house of our God.

³Hallelujah, for the LORD is good;

sing praise to His name, for it is delightful.

⁴For Yah has chosen Jacob for Himself,
Israel as His treasured possession.

⁵I know that the LORD is great,
and our Lord is above all gods.

⁶Whatever the LORD desires, He does —
in the heavens and on the earth,
in the seas and in all the depths.

⁷He raises clouds from the ends of the earth;
He makes lightning for the rain;
He brings wind from His storehouses.

⁸He struck down the firstborn of Egypt,
both human and animal.

⁹He sent signs and wonders
into your midst, Egypt —
against Pharaoh and all his servants.

¹⁰He struck down many nations
and killed mighty kings —

¹¹Sihon, the Amorite king,
and Og, king of Bashan,
and all the kingdoms of Canaan.

¹²He gave their land as an inheritance —
an inheritance for Israel His people.

¹³LORD, your name endures forever;
LORD, your renown through every generation.

¹⁴For the LORD will bring justice for His people
and will have compassion on His servants.

¹⁵The idols of the nations are silver and gold,
the work of human hands.

¹⁶They have mouths but cannot speak;
they have eyes but cannot see.

¹⁷They have ears but cannot hear;
there is not even breath in their mouths.

¹⁸Those who make them will become like them —
everyone who trusts in them.

¹⁹House of Israel, bless the LORD!
House of Aaron, bless the LORD!

20House of Levi, bless the LORD!
You who fear the LORD, bless the LORD!

21Blessed be the LORD from Zion,
He who dwells in Jerusalem.
Hallelujah!

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The triple repetition of hallelu ('praise!') in a single verse creates rhythmic urgency. The address to avdei YHWH ('servants of the LORD') connects directly to Psalm 134:1, where the same servants were called to bless — the vocabulary links the two psalms as a liturgical pair.
2. The 'standing' (omdim) is the same posture of service from Psalm 134:1. The specification of 'courts' (chatsrot) — the open-air areas surrounding the temple — indicates that this praise is public, congregational, not confined to the inner sanctuary where only priests could enter.
3. The pairing of tov ('good') and na'im ('pleasant, delightful') echoes Psalm 133:1 — what was said of brotherly unity is now said of the LORD Himself and of the act of praising Him. The word na'im could modify the name ('His name is delightful') or the act of singing ('singing is delightful'). The ambiguity enriches both readings.
4. The word segullah appears in Exodus 19:5, Deuteronomy 7:6, 14:2, 26:18, and Malachi 3:17. In each case it describes Israel's unique status as God's personal possession. The word likely derives from Akkadian sikiltum ('possession, property'). We render it 'treasured possession' to capture both the ownership and the value.
5. The shift to first person singular (ani yadati, 'I know') is personal testimony within communal worship. The claim is not monotheism in the philosophical sense but the assertion of incomparability: YHWH is greater than all elohim. The word mi-kol ('above all, more than all') does not necessarily affirm the existence of other gods — it asserts that whatever else might claim divine status, the LORD surpasses it.
6. The word tehomot ('depths, deeps') is the plural of tehom, the primordial deep of Genesis 1:2. In ancient Near Eastern cosmology, the deep was a chaotic force that preceded creation. By asserting God's sovereignty over the tehomot, the psalm claims that even the most primordial, chaotic forces are under God's command.
7. The word nesi'im can mean 'clouds,' 'vapors,' or 'mists.' The root nasa means 'to lift, carry.' These are the rising vapors that become rain clouds — the first stage of the rain cycle, which the psalm attributes entirely to God's agency. The parallel with Jeremiah 10:13 is so close that one text is almost certainly quoting the other, or both draw from a common liturgical source.
8. The transition from weather sovereignty (v. 7) to the Exodus plagues (v. 8) is seamless — the same God who controls rain and lightning is the God who struck Egypt. The phrase me-adam ad behemah ('from human to animal') indicates the totality of the plague's reach, echoing Exodus 12:29.
9. The phrase otot u-mofim ('signs and wonders') is the standard Deuteronomistic vocabulary for the plagues (Deuteronomy 4:34, 6:22, 7:19). The shift to second person address (betokekhi, 'into your midst') is dramatic — the psalm speaks directly to Egypt as if it were present, a technique that intensifies the rhetorical power of the recitation.
10. The narrative shifts from the Exodus to the conquest. The generic 'many nations' and 'mighty kings' prepare for the specific names in the next verse. The verbs hikkah ('struck') and harag ('killed') are blunt and direct — the psalm does not soften the military violence of the conquest narrative.
11. Sihon and Og are the two Transjordanian kings defeated before the crossing of the Jordan (Numbers 21:21-35). Their names became formulaic in Israel's liturgical memory — they appear together in Deuteronomy 1:4, 3:1-11, 4:47, 29:7, 31:4; Joshua 2:10, 9:10, 12:4; Nehemiah 9:22; and Psalms 136:19-20. They represent the first victories of the conquest, the proof that God would give the land.
12. The word nachalah ('inheritance, allotted portion') is one of the most theologically loaded land terms in the Hebrew Bible. It carries the sense of permanent, divinely granted possession — not earned, not purchased, but allotted by the sovereign. The double use (nachalah nachalah) is emphatic: this land is truly, genuinely, permanently Israel's inheritance.
13. The 'name' (shem) and the 'memorial/renown' (zikhr) are parallel expressions for God's reputation and identity as known by His people. The phrase le-dor va-dor ('generation to generation') is the Hebrew idiom for perpetuity through time — not abstract eternity but ongoing remembrance in each successive generation. This verse echoes Exodus 3:15, where God tells Moses that YHWH is 'my name forever and my memorial to all generations.'
14. This verse is drawn directly from the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32:36. In its original context, it describes God's turning point — after discipline, He vindicates His people and has compassion on them. The psalm uses the quotation to assure worshipers that God's sovereignty (celebrated in vv. 5-12) is exercised on behalf of, not against, His people.
15. The word atsabbei ('idols') comes from a root meaning 'to shape, form, fashion' and carries a secondary association with etsev ('pain, grief'). The idols are shaped things that bring grief. The polemic begins with their material: silver and gold — valuable but inert. And their origin: human hands — they are made by the very beings they claim to rule.

16. The idol polemic catalogs the sensory organs that the images possess in form but not in function. This section (vv. 15-18) closely parallels Psalm 115:4-8. The contrast is with the living God of verses 5-14, who speaks, sees, acts, and responds. The idols are the anti-God: shaped like beings but utterly inert.
17. The climax of the polemic: not only can the idols not speak, see, or hear — they do not even breathe. The word *ruach* ('breath, wind, spirit') is the most basic sign of life. Its absence confirms that the idols are not merely limited gods but no gods at all — dead objects shaped like living beings.
18. The principle 'you become like what you worship' is stated here and in Psalm 115:8 as a theological law. Hosea 9:10 expresses the same idea: 'They became detestable like the thing they loved.' The psalm is not merely mocking idolaters but warning Israel: worship shapes the worshiper.
19. The closing cascade of blessings addresses four groups in descending specificity: all Israel, the priestly house of Aaron, the Levitical house of Levi, and all who fear the LORD. This fourfold call appears also in Psalm 115:9-11 and Psalm 118:2-4, suggesting a fixed liturgical formula. Each group is invited to participate in the same act: blessing the LORD.
20. The final group, *yirei YHWH* ('those who fear the LORD'), may include non-Israelite God-fearers — proselytes or sympathizers who worship Israel's God without being ethnically Israelite. This broadens the call beyond tribal boundaries to anyone whose posture before God is one of reverent awe.
21. The phrase *barukh YHWH mi-Tsion* ('blessed be the LORD from Zion') echoes Psalm 128:5 and Psalm 134:3, creating a web of cross-references within the Psalms of Ascent and its immediate aftermath. Zion is the source point of blessing — not because the geography is magical but because God has chosen to dwell there.

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Summary: *The Great Hallel. Twenty-six verses, each ending with the refrain 'for His faithful love endures forever.' The psalm moves through creation (vv. 4-9), the Exodus (vv. 10-16), the conquest (vv. 17-22), God's rescue of Israel from lowliness (vv. 23-24), and His provision of food to all living things (v. 25), before closing with a final call to give thanks (v. 26). The refrain *ki le-olam chasdo* ('for His faithful love endures forever') is repeated in every single verse — twenty-six times.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The relentless repetition of the refrain is the psalm's genius. Twenty-six times the congregation responds with the same words, and the repetition is not redundancy but insistence. Each verse presents a different act of God — creating light, splitting the sea, killing kings, feeding all flesh — and after each one, the same truth is declared: His faithful love endures forever. The structure teaches that *chesed* is not one attribute among many but the interpretive key to everything God does. Creation is *chesed*. Liberation is *chesed*. Conquest is *chesed*. Daily bread is *chesed*. The psalm was likely performed antiphonally, with a cantor singing the first half of each verse and the congregation responding with the refrain. This means the congregation's most-repeated theological statement was a declaration about *chesed*.*

Translation Friction: *The Hebrew word *chesed* has no single English equivalent. 'Mercy' (KJV) is too narrow; 'lovingkindness' (older translations) is not a real English word; 'steadfast love' (many modern translations) is closer but still clinical. We render it 'faithful love' because *chesed* is love that is loyal, love that persists through covenant obligation, love that does not quit. It is God's self-binding commitment to His people expressed in ongoing acts of care. The twenty-six repetitions in this psalm may not be accidental — the numerical value of YHWH (*yod-he-vav-he*) in gematria is 26, suggesting the psalm's structure mirrors the divine name itself.*

Connections: *The refrain appears in 1 Chronicles 16:34, 2 Chronicles 5:13, 7:3, and Ezra 3:11 — always at moments of intense liturgical celebration (the ark's arrival, the temple dedication, the second temple's foundation). Jeremiah 33:11 prophesies a day when the refrain will be heard again in the restored land. The phrase *ki le-olam chasdo* is arguably the most repeated liturgical formula in the Hebrew Bible. Psalm 136 shares extensive content with Psalm 135, but where Psalm 135 narrates, Psalm 136 responds — each act of God becomes an occasion for the *chesed* declaration.*

Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good,
for His faithful love endures forever.

²Give thanks to the God of gods,
for His faithful love endures forever.

³Give thanks to the Lord of lords,
for His faithful love endures forever.

⁴To the one who alone does great wonders,
for His faithful love endures forever.

⁵To the one who made the heavens with understanding,
for His faithful love endures forever.

⁶To the one who spread out the earth upon the waters,
for His faithful love endures forever.

⁷To the one who made the great lights,
for His faithful love endures forever.

⁸The sun to rule the day,
for His faithful love endures forever.

⁹The moon and stars to rule the night,
for His faithful love endures forever.

¹⁰To the one who struck Egypt through their firstborn,
for His faithful love endures forever.

¹¹And brought Israel out from among them,
for His faithful love endures forever.

¹²With a strong hand and an outstretched arm,
for His faithful love endures forever.

¹³To the one who split the Sea of Reeds into sections,
for His faithful love endures forever.

¹⁴And made Israel pass through the middle of it,
for His faithful love endures forever.

¹⁵And shook off Pharaoh and his army into the Sea of Reeds,
for His faithful love endures forever.

¹⁶To the one who led His people through the wilderness,
for His faithful love endures forever.

¹⁷To the one who struck down great kings,
for His faithful love endures forever.

¹⁸And killed mighty kings,
for His faithful love endures forever.

¹⁹Sihon, king of the Amorites,
for His faithful love endures forever.

²⁰And Og, king of Bashan,
for His faithful love endures forever.

²¹And gave their land as an inheritance,
for His faithful love endures forever.

²²An inheritance for Israel His servant,
for His faithful love endures forever.

²³Who remembered us in our lowliness,
for His faithful love endures forever.

²⁴And tore us free from our enemies,
for His faithful love endures forever.

²⁵The one who gives food to all living things,
for His faithful love endures forever.

²⁶Give thanks to the God of heaven,
for His faithful love endures forever.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The KJV renders *chesed* as 'mercy,' which captures only one dimension of the word. *Chesed* includes mercy but also encompasses loyalty, commitment, kindness, and covenant faithfulness. It is the word used when Ruth clings to Naomi, when David shows kindness to Jonathan's son, when God remembers His covenant with Abraham. We render it 'faithful love' throughout this psalm to hold together the love and the faithfulness.
2. The title *Elohei ha-Elohim* ('God of gods') uses the superlative construction common in Hebrew: the ultimate among all that could be called divine. It does not necessarily affirm the existence of other gods but asserts YHWH's supremacy over every possible claimant to divine status.
3. *Adonei ha-Adonim* ('Lord of lords') parallels the previous verse's 'God of gods.' Together they form a double superlative: supreme God, supreme ruler. The three opening verses (vv. 1-3) establish the recipient of thanks before the reasons begin in verse 4.
4. The word *levaddo* ('alone, by Himself') is theologically significant: no other being participates in God's wonder-working. The *niflaot gedolot* ('great wonders') encompasses everything that follows — creation, Exodus, conquest — all performed by God alone.
5. The word *tevunah* ('understanding, insight, intelligence') attributes the creation to divine wisdom, not raw power. The heavens are not brute-forced into existence but crafted with intelligence. This echoes Proverbs 3:19: 'The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding He established the heavens.'
6. The verb *roqa* ('to spread out, to beat out, to flatten') is a metalworking term — like hammering gold into thin sheets. The image is of God flattening the earth and laying it over the primordial waters, reflecting the ancient cosmology of Genesis 1:9-10 where dry land emerges from the waters.
7. The 'great lights' (*orim gedolim*) echoes Genesis 1:16 exactly — the same phrase used for the sun and moon on the fourth day of creation. The psalm follows the Genesis creation order, treating the creation narrative as a liturgical script.
8. The verb *memsheleth* ('to rule, to govern') assigns the sun a political role — it governs the day as a regent governs territory. In a world where surrounding cultures worshiped the sun as a god, the psalm reduces it to a servant assigned a shift by the true sovereign.
9. The moon and stars together govern the night. The plural *memshelot* ('rules, governances') distributes the authority — the night has multiple governors, not one. This completes the creation section (vv. 4-9) before the psalm shifts to the Exodus in verse 10.
10. The transition from creation to Exodus is seamless — the God who made the sun is the God who struck Egypt. The phrase *bi-vekhoreihem* ('through their firstborn') concentrates the tenth plague into a single word: the firstborn are both the target and the means of the blow. Declaring 'His faithful love endures forever' after an act of destruction is theologically challenging — the psalm insists that even judgment is an expression of *chesed* toward those being delivered.

11. The verb *vayyotse* ('and He brought out') is the Exodus verb — the *hiphil* of *yatsa*, the root of the entire Exodus narrative. God is the subject; Israel is the object. The deliverance is entirely God's act.
12. The phrase *be-yad chazaqah u-vi-zeroa netuyah* ('with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm') is the Deuteronomic formula for the Exodus (Deuteronomy 4:34, 5:15, 7:19, 11:2, 26:8). It is one of the most formulaic phrases in the Hebrew Bible — an Israelite hearing these words would immediately think 'Exodus.' The hand and arm are anthropomorphisms for God's direct, personal intervention.
13. The verb *gozer* ('to cut, split, divide') is graphic — God cut the sea into *gezarim* ('sections, pieces'), as one cuts meat or cloth. The *Yam Suf* ('Sea of Reeds') is the traditional body of water crossed during the Exodus. We render it 'Sea of Reeds' rather than 'Red Sea' because *suf* means 'reed, rush' (as in Exodus 2:3, where baby Moses is placed among the reeds).
14. The *hiphil* verb *he'evir* ('He caused to pass through') emphasizes God's agency — Israel did not swim or wade; God caused them to cross. The preposition *be-tokho* ('through its midst') places Israel in the center of the divided sea, surrounded by walls of water on both sides.
15. The verb *ni'er* is more dismissive than 'overthrew' (KJV). It contains the idea of shaking something loose — like shaking insects off a garment. Applied to Pharaoh and his entire army, it reduces Egypt's military might to something God brushes away without effort.
16. The participle *molikhi* ('the one leading') describes ongoing guidance — not a single act but forty years of sustained direction through the desert. The wilderness (*midbar*) was not merely a transit zone but the place where Israel was formed as a covenant people. God's faithful love endures even through the barren places.
17. The conquest section begins (vv. 17-22), moving from the wilderness to the Transjordanian victories. The 'great kings' (*melakhim gedolim*) are specified in the following verses — Sihon and Og, the same pair memorialized in Psalm 135:10-11.
18. The word *addirim* ('mighty, majestic, powerful') elevates the defeated kings — these were not petty chieftains but formidable rulers. Their might makes their defeat more impressive and God's *chesed* more visible.
19. Sihon ruled the territory between the Arnon and Jabbok rivers in Transjordan. His defeat is narrated in Numbers 21:21-31 and became one of the most frequently cited events in Israel's liturgical memory of the conquest.
20. Og ruled the fertile region of Bashan in the northern Transjordan. Deuteronomy 3:11 notes that his iron bed was nine cubits long — he was remembered as a giant. His defeat, narrated in Numbers 21:33-35, opened the way to the northern approaches to the promised land.
21. The word *nachalah* ('inheritance') reappears from Psalm 135:12. The conquered land is not plunder but inheritance — a divinely granted portion held in trust.
22. Israel is called *avdo* ('His servant') — a title of honor, not degradation. In the ancient Near East, the king's servant was his trusted agent. Israel serves the cosmic sovereign as His representative on earth. The land is the servant's portion, granted by the master.
23. The verb *zakhar* ('remembered') in Hebrew does not mean 'recalled to mind' (as if God had forgotten) but 'turned His attention to with intent to act.' Divine remembering is always the prelude to divine intervention.
24. The verb *vayyifrequeinu* (from *paraq*, 'to tear away, to rescue by force, to snatch free') is more violent than 'redeemed.' It describes a forceful extraction — God ripped Israel from the grip of enemies the way one tears prey from a predator's jaws. The word *tsareinu* ('our enemies,' literally 'our adversaries, our distressers') comes from the root *tsarar* ('to bind, to press, to distress').
25. The phrase *kol basar* ('all flesh') encompasses not just all humans but all living creatures — animals, birds, sea life. The psalm's movement from Israel-specific salvation (vv. 10-24) to universal provision (v. 25) prevents the theology from becoming exclusively national. God's *chesed* has a particular expression (Israel's history) but a universal scope (all living things eat because of Him).
26. The title *El ha-shamayim* ('God of heaven') appears in Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel as a way of identifying Israel's God to non-Israelite audiences. Its use here universalizes the psalm's closing: this is not merely Israel's tribal deity but the God of heaven itself — the creator, liberator, and sustainer of all.

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Summary: *The psalm of exile. Babylonian captives sit by the rivers of Babylon and weep, hanging their harps on willows. Their captors demand songs of Zion, but the exiles refuse: how can they sing the LORD's song in a foreign land? The psalm then shifts to a fierce oath of loyalty to Jerusalem and closes with a raw cry for vengeance against Babylon and Edom, culminating in the shocking image of verse 9.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This is one of the most emotionally extreme psalms in the Psalter — it moves from tender grief to savage rage without transition or apology. The opening image of weeping exiles is among the most beautiful in all poetry, while the closing image of dashing infants against rocks is among the most disturbing in all scripture. The psalm refuses to separate these emotions; they belong together as the full spectrum of what displacement, humiliation, and loss produce in the human*

soul. The captors' request to 'sing us one of Zion's songs' is not innocent entertainment — it is the demand of the powerful that the defeated perform their culture as spectacle. The exiles' refusal is an act of resistance: the songs of Zion are not for Babylonian amusement.

Translation Friction: Verse 9 is the most difficult verse in the Psalter for modern readers: 'Happy is the one who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rock.' This is not a command or a prophecy but a curse — the raw prayer of a traumatized people who witnessed exactly this violence done to their own children (cf. 2 Kings 8:12, Isaiah 13:16, Hosea 13:16, Nahum 3:10). The psalm does not command anyone to act on this wish; it places the wish before God. The violence of the language reflects the violence that created it. To sanitize this verse is to silence the voice of the victim. To celebrate it is to miss the entire arc of scripture that moves toward enemy love. The psalm is honest about what humans feel in the aftermath of atrocity; it does not pretend those feelings are righteous.

Connections: The 'rivers of Babylon' likely refer to the canal systems of the Euphrates — the irrigation channels where deportees were settled (cf. Ezekiel 1:1, 'by the river Chebar'). The demand to sing echoes the forced labor songs of slaves. The oath to Jerusalem (vv. 5-6) parallels the covenant loyalty language of the Psalms of Ascent. The curse against Edom (v. 7) reflects Edom's complicity in Jerusalem's destruction (Obadiah 10-14, Ezekiel 25:12-14). The prophecy of Babylon's destruction being answered measure for measure echoes Isaiah 13:16 and Jeremiah 51:56.

¹By the rivers of Babylon —
there we sat down and wept
when we remembered Zion.

²On the willows there
we hung our lyres.

³For there our captors demanded songs from us,
and our tormentors demanded joy:
"Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"

⁴How can we sing the LORD's song
on foreign soil?

⁵If I forget you, Jerusalem,
let my right hand forget its skill.

⁶Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth
if I do not remember you,
if I do not set Jerusalem
above my highest joy.

⁷Remember, LORD, against the sons of Edom
the day of Jerusalem —
how they cried, "Tear it down! Tear it down!
Down to its foundations!"

⁸Daughter of Babylon, you devastated one —
happy is the one who repays you
for what you have done to us.

⁹Happy is the one who seizes your infants
and dashes them against the rock.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The 'rivers' (naharot) of Babylon are not natural rivers but the vast canal system that irrigated Mesopotamia. Ezekiel was among the exiles 'by the river Chebar' (Ezekiel 1:1), a major canal near Nippur. The exiles were settled in agricultural communities along these waterways — the setting is specific and historical, not merely poetic.
2. The word aravim could refer to willows (*Salix*) or poplars (*Populus euphratica*), both of which grow along Mesopotamian waterways. The kinnor is the primary stringed instrument of Israelite worship — David played it before Saul (1 Samuel 16:23), and it accompanied temple psalmody. Hanging it in a tree is the musical equivalent of refusing to speak.
3. The word tolaleinu is rare and debated. It may derive from a root meaning 'to mock, to taunt' or from a root meaning 'to torment.' Either way, it describes people who inflict suffering — these are not friendly audiences asking for a cultural exchange but captors demanding a performance from the conquered.
3. The phrase mi-shir Tsiyon ('from the songs of Zion') refers to the temple psalms — songs praising the LORD's presence in Jerusalem, His choice of Zion, His kingship from the holy mountain. To sing these songs in Babylon, by the rivers of the empire that destroyed the temple, would be to sever the songs from their meaning.
4. The phrase shir YHWH ('the song of the LORD') elevates the songs beyond human composition — they belong to God. This is not merely folk music or national anthem; it is sacred song, bound to a sacred place. The exiles' refusal to sing is an act of theological integrity: they will not profane what is holy by performing it as spectacle.
5. The phrase tishkach yemini ('let my right hand forget') is elliptical — the object is implied. Most scholars supply 'its skill' or 'its function.' Some read it as 'let my right hand wither' (from a different root). Either way, the curse targets the hand's ability to function — the exile stakes his bodily capacity on his fidelity to Jerusalem.
6. The two self-curses (hand and tongue) correspond to the two faculties needed to sing the songs of Zion: instrumental skill and vocal ability. The exile offers to sacrifice both rather than forget Jerusalem. This is the language of total commitment — the exile's entire musical identity is pledged to a destroyed city.
7. Edom's role in Jerusalem's fall is confirmed by multiple prophetic texts: Obadiah 10-14 details Edom's crimes (standing aside, gloating, looting, cutting off refugees), Ezekiel 25:12-14 announces judgment against Edom for acting in vengeance, and Lamentations 4:21-22 warns Edom that judgment is coming. The aru aru ('tear down, strip bare') uses a verb that implies both demolition and humiliation — laying bare, exposing, stripping naked.
8. The phrase ha-shedudah could be translated 'the destroyed one' (referring to Babylon's future fall) or 'the destructive one' (referring to what Babylon did to Jerusalem). The ambiguity may be intentional — Babylon is both the destroyer and the one destined to be destroyed. The prophetic perfect tense treats the future as certain.
9. This verse must be understood within its historical context: the Babylonian army did destroy Jerusalem, did kill its inhabitants, did commit atrocities against children. The exiles who speak this psalm are not hypothetically imagining violence — they are remembering it and praying that the perpetrators receive the same treatment. The verse is not a moral instruction but a prayer from the depths of trauma. Its inclusion in scripture is itself remarkable — the Bible does not censor the prayers of the suffering, even when those prayers are terrible.
9. Isaiah 13:16 prophesies the same fate for Babylon: 'Their infants will be dashed to pieces before their eyes.' The psalm's wish aligns with the prophetic tradition that sees Babylon's fall as divine justice. Cyrus's conquest of Babylon in 539 BCE fulfilled this expectation, though the historical conquest was notably less violent than the psalm anticipates.

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Summary: *A psalm of David. The psalmist gives wholehearted thanks before the divine assembly, bowing toward God's temple and praising His name for faithful love and truth. God answered when he called and strengthened his soul. The psalm envisions all the kings of the earth praising the LORD when they hear His words, for though the LORD is exalted, He sees the lowly. The psalm closes with a confession of trust: the LORD will complete what He has begun, for His faithful love endures forever.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This psalm bridges the personal and the cosmic. It begins with an individual giving thanks ('I give you thanks with all my heart') and ends with a universal vision of kings singing the LORD's praises. The key theological claim is in verse 6: the LORD is ram ('exalted, high') yet He sees the shafal ('lowly, humble') and knows the gavah ('proud, haughty') from a distance. Height in God's case produces not distance but attention to those below. The final verse contains one of the most theologically loaded statements in the Psalter: YHWH yigmor ba'adi ('the LORD will complete*

what concerns me') — God finishes what He starts.

Translation Friction: *The phrase neged elohim in verse 1 ('before the gods' or 'before the divine beings') is ambiguous. It could mean 'before the heavenly court' (divine beings who witness human worship), 'before the judges' (human authorities), or 'before the idols' (in defiant contrast to false gods). The LXX translates it as 'before the angels.' The ambiguity is likely intentional — the psalmist's worship takes place in a cosmic arena, witnessed by whatever powers exist.*

Connections: *The statement 'You have exalted your word above all your name' (v. 2) is one of the most debated lines in the Psalms — it may mean that God's faithfulness to His promises exceeds even His reputation. The closing affirmation that God will not abandon the work of His hands (v. 8) echoes Philippians 1:6. The phrase chesed le-olam ('faithful love forever') connects this psalm to the Great Hallel of Psalm 136. The vision of kings praising God anticipates Psalm 148 and the universal worship themes of Isaiah 2:2-4.*

¹Of David.

I give You thanks with all my heart;
before the divine assembly I sing Your praise.

²I bow toward Your holy temple
and give thanks to Your name
for Your faithful love and Your truth,
for You have exalted Your word above all Your name.

³On the day I called, You answered me;
You made me bold with strength in my soul.

⁴All the kings of the earth will give You thanks, LORD,
for they have heard the words of Your mouth.

⁵And they will sing of the ways of the LORD,
for great is the glory of the LORD.

⁶Though the LORD is exalted,
He sees the lowly,
and the proud He knows from a distance.

⁷Though I walk through the thick of trouble,
You keep me alive.
Against the rage of my enemies You stretch out Your hand,
and Your right hand saves me.

⁸The LORD will complete what concerns me.
LORD, Your faithful love endures forever —
do not let go of the works of Your hands.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The phrase neged elohim is one of the more contested expressions in the Psalms. We render it 'before the divine assembly' because the context of cosmic worship best fits the psalm's movement from individual thanks to universal recognition by kings. The psalmist's worship is not a private act but a declaration made before witnesses, both heavenly and earthly.
2. The clause ki higdalta al kol shimkha imratekha is one of the most debated lines in the Psalter. Some emend the text; the LXX reads differently. Taken as it stands in the MT, it says God has magnified His word (imrah, 'saying, promise') above His name (shem, 'name, reputation'). This may mean: God's specific covenant promises are the greatest thing about Him — greater even than His cosmic reputation. His reliability outshines His majesty.

3. The verb *tarhiveni* (from *rahav*, 'to be wide, spacious, bold') means God expanded or emboldened the psalmist's inner life. The image is spatial — a soul that was cramped by fear is made wide, spacious, bold. The word *oz* ('strength, power') specifies what fills the expanded space: not mere relief but actual strength.
4. The vision expands from one worshiper to all the kings of the earth — *kol malkhei erets*. The trigger for their worship is hearing: *ki shamu imrei fikha* ('for they have heard the words of Your mouth'). When God's words reach the nations, the nations respond with thanksgiving. This is a missionary vision — not of Israel going to the nations but of God's words reaching the nations' rulers.
5. The kings will not merely acknowledge God but will sing — *ve-yashiru be-darkhei YHWH* ('they will sing of/in the ways of the LORD'). The 'ways' (*darkhei*) are God's characteristic patterns of action — His justice, mercy, faithfulness. The reason is *kavod YHWH* ('the glory of the LORD'), which is great (*gadol*). When the nations see how God acts, they will sing about it.
6. The verb *yeyeda* (from *yada*, 'to know') applied to the proud 'from a distance' is ambiguous: does God know about the proud from far away (omniscience) or does He keep them at a distance (relational remoteness)? The contrast with the lowly suggests the latter — God draws near to the humble and keeps the proud at a distance. The same theology appears in James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5.
7. The phrase *be-qerev tsarah* ('in the midst of trouble') places the psalmist inside the trouble, not approaching it or remembering it but walking through it. The verb *techayeni* ('You keep me alive, You revive me') is from *chayah* ('to live') — in the thick of mortal danger, God sustains life. The right hand (*yeminekha*) is the hand of power and salvation throughout the Psalms.
8. The verb *teref* (from *raphah*, 'to let go, to relax, to abandon') in the negative imperative *al teref* means 'do not release, do not let drop, do not abandon.' The image is of God holding something He has made and the psalmist asking Him not to open His hands. This is one of the most intimate images of divine care in the Psalter — God as the craftsman who will not discard His own work.

139

Summary: *A psalm of David. The most sustained meditation on divine omniscience and omnipresence in the Hebrew Bible. The psalmist declares that God has searched him and known him completely — every movement, every thought, every word before it is spoken. He cannot flee from God's presence: not in heaven, not in the grave, not at the farthest reach of the sea, not in darkness. God wove him together in the womb, and all his days were written before any of them existed. The psalm then turns sharply to a plea against the wicked before closing with an invitation for God to search and test the psalmist's own heart.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 139 is unique in the Psalter for its sustained philosophical depth combined with intimate personal address. It is simultaneously the most theological and the most personal psalm — cosmic claims about God's knowledge and presence are expressed as 'You know me... You are there... You knit me.' The theology is never abstract; it is always relational. The psalmist does not prove God's omniscience; he addresses the One who knows him. The womb passage (vv. 13-16) is one of the most extraordinary poetic achievements in ancient literature — it imagines God as a weaver, an embroiderer, a sculptor working in the hidden depths of the earth (a metaphor for the womb), crafting the psalmist's body with deliberate artistry. The closing invitation — 'Search me, God' — is remarkable because the psalm has spent twenty-two verses establishing that God already knows everything. The psalmist invites what is already happening, which transforms omniscience from a threat into a comfort.*

Translation Friction: *Verses 19-22 contain violent imprecation against the wicked that seems to break the psalm's contemplative tone. Some scholars view these verses as a later addition; others see them as integral — the psalmist, having meditated on God's total knowledge, logically asks why those who oppose this God are allowed to persist. The shift is jarring but theologically coherent: if God truly knows everything, then the wicked are not merely committing crimes but rebelling against the all-knowing One. Verse 16 is textually difficult — the Hebrew of *golem* ('unformed substance') and the phrase about days written in a book is compressed and partially obscure, leading to significant translation divergence.*

Connections: *The omniscience theme connects to Psalm 44:21 ('He knows the secrets of the heart') and Jeremiah 17:10 ('I the LORD search the heart'). The womb imagery parallels Job 10:8-12 (God forming Job's body) and Jeremiah 1:5 ('Before I formed you in the womb I knew you'). The 'wings of the dawn' (v. 9) echoes Malachi 4:2 ('the sun of righteousness with healing in its wings'). The closing plea to be searched connects back to the opening declaration of being known, forming a circular structure. The psalm anticipates Romans 8:38-39 (nothing can separate us from God's love) and Acts 17:27-28 ('in Him we live and move and have our being').*

¹For the music director. Of David. A psalm.
LORD, You have searched me
and You know me.

²You know when I sit and when I rise;
You understand my thoughts from far away.

³You sift my traveling and my resting;
You are familiar with all my ways.

⁴Before a word is on my tongue,
LORD, You know it completely.

⁵Behind and before, You hem me in;
You lay Your hand upon me.

⁶Such knowledge is too wondrous for me —
too high; I cannot reach it.

⁷Where can I go from Your Spirit?
Where can I flee from Your presence?

⁸If I ascend to heaven, You are there.
If I make my bed in Sheol — there You are.

⁹If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle at the far end of the sea —

¹⁰even there Your hand would guide me,
and Your right hand would hold me.

¹¹If I say, "Surely darkness will overwhelm me,
and the light around me will become night" —

¹²even darkness is not dark to You.
The night shines like the day;
darkness and light are the same to You.

¹³For You created my inmost parts;
You wove me together in my mother's womb.

¹⁴I thank You, for I am awesomely, wondrously made.
Your works are wondrous,
and my soul knows it well.

¹⁵My frame was not hidden from You
when I was made in secret,
embroidered in the depths of the earth.

¹⁶Your eyes saw my unformed body.
In Your book they were all written —
the days that were shaped for me

when not one of them yet existed.

¹⁷How precious to me are Your thoughts, God!
How vast is the sum of them!

¹⁸If I tried to count them, they would outnumber the sand.
When I awake, I am still with You.

¹⁹If only You would slay the wicked, God!
You men of bloodshed — get away from me!

²⁰They speak of You with wicked intent;
Your enemies use Your name for falsehood.

²¹Do I not hate those who hate You, LORD?
Do I not loathe those who rise against You?

²²With complete hatred I hate them;
they have become my own enemies.

²³Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.

²⁴See if there is any hurtful way in me,
and lead me in the way that lasts forever.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb *chaqar* ('to search, probe, investigate') appears in Job 28:3 for mining ore from the earth — digging deep to find what is hidden. Applied to God's knowledge of a person, it implies God has gone to the deepest levels of the psalmist's being. This is not surface knowledge but excavation.
2. The merism 'sitting and rising' covers all of daily life — everything between lying down and standing up, which is to say everything. It is the Hebrew way of saying 'every moment of your existence.' The word *re'i* is textually linked to either 'thought/purpose' or 'shepherding' — both meanings are theologically rich and may be deliberately ambiguous.
3. The verb *zerita* ('You have sifted, winnowed, scattered') is an agricultural term — winnowing grain to separate wheat from chaff. God sifts the psalmist's life, examining each component. The words *orchi* ('my path, my walking') and *riv'i* ('my lying down, my resting') form another merism: movement and stillness, waking and sleeping. The verb *hiskantah* ('You are familiar with, You are accustomed to') means intimate, habitual knowledge — not newly discovered but long known.
4. The particle *hen* ('behold, look!') expresses astonishment — the psalmist is amazed by what he is saying. The word *khullah* ('all of it, entirely, completely') emphasizes that God's pre-knowledge is not partial or approximate but total.
5. The word *tsartani* is from the same root as *tsarah* ('trouble, distress') — being hemmed in by God can feel like distress. But the laying of the hand (*kaf*) is a gesture of blessing, protection, and ownership. The verse holds both the threat and the comfort of being completely known.
6. The adjective *peliah* ('wondrous, extraordinary, beyond comprehension') is from the same root as *niflaot* ('wonders') in Psalm 131:1. There, the psalmist renounced walking in things too wondrous for him; here, he encounters the most wondrous thing of all — God's knowledge of him — and confesses he cannot grasp it. The verb *nisgavah* ('it is set high, elevated, inaccessible') and *lo ukhal lah* ('I cannot attain/reach it') together convey a knowledge that exists but transcends human comprehension.
7. The question format does not express desire to flee but astonishment at the impossibility of doing so. Jonah 1:3 narrates an actual attempt to flee from God's presence — this psalm explains why such flight is futile.
8. Sheol is not hell in the later Christian sense but the shadowy realm of the dead — a place of silence, stillness, and diminished existence (cf. Ecclesiastes 9:10). The claim that God is present even there pushes against other psalmic texts that describe Sheol as a place cut off from God (Psalm 88:5-6). Psalm 139 extends divine omnipresence to its absolute limit.
9. The 'wings of the dawn' (*kanfei shachar*) is one of the most beautiful images in the Psalter. The dawn was imagined as a bird spreading its wings across the sky, its light extending from horizon to horizon. To take its wings is to move at the speed of light itself. *Acharit yam* ('the end/farthest part of the sea') is the western edge of the world in Israelite geography — beyond the Mediterranean, beyond everything known.

10. The verbs *tancheni* ('would guide me,' from *nachah*, 'to lead, guide') and *tochazeni* ('would hold me, seize me,' from *achaz*, 'to grasp, take hold of') transform omnipresence from a philosophical concept into personal care. God is not merely present at the farthest reaches — He is active there, guiding and holding. The right hand (*yamin*) is the hand of skill, strength, and favor.
11. The verb *yeshufeni* ('will overwhelm me, crush me, bruise me') is the same rare verb from Genesis 3:15, where the serpent strikes the heel. Darkness is imagined as an attacking force, not merely an absence of light. The psalmist's desperate hope — that darkness could hide him — is about to be overturned.
12. The theological implications are enormous: if darkness and light are identical to God, then the categories humans use to hide (night, secrecy, concealment) have no force before Him. This dissolves the fundamental human experience of being unseen in the dark. It also means that God's creative and sustaining work continues uninterrupted by night — He does not sleep (Psalm 121:4) and He does not squint.
13. The word *kilyot* ('kidneys') functions in Hebrew the way 'heart' functions in English — as the seat of deep emotion, conscience, and moral sensitivity. Jeremiah 17:10: 'I the LORD search the heart and test the kidneys.' God created the organ He now searches.
13. The verb *sakakh* in the *piel* (*tesukkeni*) means 'to weave together, to knit, to intertwine.' Some connect it to *sukkah* ('booth, shelter'), yielding 'You sheltered me.' We follow the weaving interpretation because it connects to the embroidery image in verse 15.
14. The phrase *noraot nifleiti* is more intense than the familiar 'fearfully and wonderfully made.' *Noraot* carries the sense of awe and even terror — the psalmist's existence is awe-inspiring, not merely 'nice.' *Nifleiti* means he is himself a wonder-work, a marvel on the level of God's mighty acts. Every human being, the psalm implies, is a divine wonder.
15. The verb *ruqqam* ('to embroider') is used in Exodus 26:36 and 27:16 for the embroidered screens of the tabernacle. The same artistry that decorated God's dwelling place is applied to the human body in the womb. The 'depths of the earth' is a mythological-poetic image, not a literal claim — it identifies the womb with the earth's hidden interior, the place of forming and shaping that no human eye can see.
16. The word *golem* appears only here in the entire Hebrew Bible. In later Jewish tradition (especially medieval mysticism), a *golem* became an artificially created being — the word's biblical meaning is simply 'unformed mass, embryo, raw material.' The concept of a divine book recording future events appears in Exodus 32:32-33 (the book of life), Daniel 12:1, and Malachi 3:16.
16. The textual note in the Hebrew (the *ketiv/qere* variation between *velo* and *vele*) creates ambiguity: 'and to Him' or 'and not.' The *qere* reading *velo* ('and to Him') yields: 'and to Him [was] one of them' — meaning each day belongs to God. The *ketiv* reading *vele* ('and not') yields: 'and not one of them [yet existed].' Both readings are theologically rich.
17. The word *yaqru* ('are precious, are heavy, are weighty') from *yaqar* describes something of great value and weight. God's *re'ekha* ('Your thoughts, Your purposes, Your intentions') toward the psalmist are not merely numerous but precious — each one carries weight and worth. The word *rasheihem* ('their sum, their heads, their chief parts') suggests the total is beyond calculation.
18. The phrase *ve-odi immakh* ('and I am still with You') is the psalm's most intimate moment. After twenty-four lines of theological exploration, the psalmist arrives at a child's experience: I woke up and You were there. The word *odi* ('still, yet, I continue to be') expresses continuity — the relationship that exists in sleep persists into waking.
19. The psalm's tone shifts abruptly. The contemplative meditation gives way to imprecation. The logic, however, follows: if God knows everything and is everywhere, why do the wicked persist? The phrase *anshei damim* ('men of blood/bloodshed') describes those who commit violence. The imperative *suru menni* ('turn aside from me, depart from me') is the psalmist's rejection of association with the violent.
20. The wicked speak God's name *la-mezimmah* ('for evil purpose, with wicked intent') and *nasa la-shav* ('lift up for emptiness/falsehood'). The charge is blasphemy — using God's name to serve lies. The language echoes the third commandment: 'You shall not lift up (*tissa*) the name of the LORD your God for emptiness (*la-shav*)' (Exodus 20:7).
21. The psalmist claims solidarity with God against God's enemies. The verb *esna* ('I hate') applied to God's enemies is the mirror of *mesanekha* ('those who hate You'). The verb *etqotat* ('I loathe, I am disgusted, I contend with') is from a root meaning 'to feel nausea, to be revolted.' The rhetoric is: my enemies are Your enemies; my hatred aligns with Your justice.
22. The phrase *takhlit sinah* ('complete/perfect hatred, hatred to the utmost') is the strongest possible expression of animosity in Hebrew. *Takhlit* means 'end, completion, perfection' — this hatred holds nothing back. The psalmist claims his enemies are God's enemies, and therefore his hatred is righteous alignment rather than personal malice. The following verses will test this claim.
23. The word *sar'appai* (from *sar'af* or *sa'if*, 'disquieting thought, anxious rumination') appears only here and in Psalm 94:19. It describes the branching, intrusive thoughts that trouble the inner life — what modern psychology might call anxious rumination. The psalmist asks God to search even these turbulent, half-formed thoughts.
24. The phrase *derekh otsev* is ambiguous. If from *etsev* ('idol'), it means 'a way of idolatry' — any hidden idol-worship in the psalmist's life. If from *etsev* ('pain, grief'), it means 'a way that causes pain' or 'a way that leads to sorrow.' The ambiguity may be productive — the psalmist asks God to find whatever is wrong, however it should be categorized.
24. The phrase *derekh olam* ('way everlasting') echoes Jeremiah 6:16: 'Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths (*netivot olam*), where the good way is, and walk in it.' The everlasting way is not a new discovery but a return to what has always been true.

140

Summary: *A psalm of David. A prayer for deliverance from violent and scheming enemies whose tongues are sharp as serpents and whose lips conceal venom. The psalmist calls on the LORD as his stronghold, asks God to frustrate the plans of the wicked, and invokes judgment upon them — fire, flooding pits, and the collapse of their own violence back upon their heads. The psalm closes with a confession of faith: the LORD defends the cause of the afflicted and the poor, and the upright will dwell in His presence.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 140 is dense with body imagery — tongues sharpened like serpents, venom under lips, hands that plan violence, feet that set traps, heads surrounded by their own mischief. The enemies are described almost entirely through their body parts, each one weaponized: the tongue attacks, the lips poison, the hands scheme, the feet trap. Against this anatomy of evil, the psalmist has only one defense: the LORD as his shield and stronghold. The psalm is also notable for its serpent imagery — the tongue sharpened like a snake (shananu leshonam kemo nachash) and the venom of asps (chamat akhshuv) under the lips. The connection to Genesis 3 is implicit: the enemies are serpent-like, their weapon is speech, and their venom is concealed.*

Translation Friction: *The imprecations in verses 9-11 are harsh: burning coals falling on enemies, being thrown into fire, cast into floods, and hunted by violence. These are not metaphorical wishes but liturgical curses — the psalmist formally invokes divine violence against human enemies. As with Psalm 137:9, the inclusion of such language in scripture raises questions about whether these prayers are models to imitate or voices to hear. The psalm itself offers a framework: the violence of the imprecation matches the violence of the enemies' schemes. The psalmist prays that what the wicked planned for others would happen to the wicked themselves — the lex talionis applied to divine judgment.*

Connections: *The serpent imagery connects to Genesis 3:1-5 (the serpent's deceptive speech) and Romans 3:13 (Paul quotes Psalm 140:3 as evidence of universal human corruption: 'the venom of asps is under their lips'). The 'snare' and 'net' imagery appears frequently in the Psalms (Psalm 141:9-10, 142:3). The closing affirmation that the LORD secures justice for the poor echoes Psalm 9:18, 12:5, and 72:4. The transition from Psalm 139 (God's total knowledge) to Psalm 140 (a cry against enemies) creates a logical sequence: the psalmist who invited God's searching now presents the wicked for God's scrutiny.*

¹For the music director. A psalm of David.

²Rescue me, LORD, from the evil person;
protect me from the violent one.

³They scheme evil in their hearts;
all day long they stir up conflict.

⁴They sharpen their tongues like a serpent;
the venom of a viper is under their lips.
Selah.

⁵Guard me, LORD, from the hands of the wicked;
protect me from the violent one
who plans to trip my steps.

⁶The arrogant have hidden a trap for me and ropes;
they have spread a net beside the path;
they have set snares for me.
Selah.

⁷I say to the LORD, "You are my God."

Hear, LORD, the voice of my pleas for mercy.

⁸LORD God, the strength of my salvation,

You have shielded my head on the day of battle.

⁹Do not grant the desires of the wicked, LORD.

Do not let their schemes succeed — they would rise in triumph.

Selah.

¹⁰As for the heads of those who surround me —

let the trouble their own lips cause cover them.

¹¹Let burning coals rain down on them;

let them be thrown into fire,

into flooding pits from which they cannot rise.

¹²Let the slanderer find no footing in the land.

Let evil hunt the violent one, blow after blow.

¹³I know that the LORD will take up the cause of the afflicted

and the justice of the poor.

¹⁴Surely the righteous will give thanks to Your name;

the upright will dwell in Your presence.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The superscription assigns the psalm to David and directs it to the *lamnatseach* ('music director, choirmaster'), indicating liturgical performance. The Davidic attribution places the psalm in the tradition of David's many experiences of being hunted by enemies — whether Saul, Absalom, or unnamed adversaries.
2. The verb *chalats* ('to rescue, to strip off, to pull out') carries the image of extracting someone from a tight place — like pulling a foot from a trap or a person from a pit. The psalmist feels caught and needs to be physically removed from danger. The plural *chamasim* ('violences') is an intensifying plural — not one act of violence but a pattern, a character defined by violence.
3. The verb *chashvu* ('they scheme, they devise, they calculate') describes deliberate planning — these are not impulsive enemies but strategic ones. The phrase *kol yom* ('all day, every day') emphasizes the relentless, sustained nature of their hostility. The verb *yaguru* ('they stir up, they gather, they muster') with *milchamot* ('wars, conflicts') presents the enemies as perpetual instigators of strife.
4. The word *akhshuv* is a type of venomous snake — possibly the horned viper or the cobra. The exact species is uncertain, but the point is clear: a deadly snake whose venom is concealed and delivered through a bite. The analogy is perfect for slanderous speech: the poison is hidden until the lips open.
4. The word *selah* appears here, a liturgical marker of uncertain meaning — possibly a musical interlude, a signal to pause, or an instruction to the musicians. It provides a breathing space after the intense serpent imagery.
5. The verb *lidhot* ('to push, to overthrow, to trip') describes the enemy's goal: to knock the psalmist off his feet, to destabilize his path. The word *pe'amai* ('my steps, my footfalls') represents the psalmist's life-course. The violent person schemes not merely to harm but to derail — to knock the psalmist from the path God has set.
6. The four trap-words (*pach*, *chavalim*, *reshet*, *moqshim*) create an image of a path surrounded by hidden dangers. The psalmist cannot see them; only God can. This is why the prayer is necessary — the traps are hidden from human perception but visible to the all-seeing God of Psalm 139.
7. The confession *Eli attah* ('You are my God') is personal and possessive — not 'a God' but 'my God.' The word *tachanunai* ('my pleas for mercy, my supplications') from the root *chanan* ('to be gracious, to show mercy') acknowledges that the psalmist has no leverage; he can only appeal to God's grace.
8. The connection between *sakakh* here (shielding the head in battle) and *sakakh* in Psalm 139:13 (weaving in the womb) creates a thematic link: the God who wove the psalmist's body also shields it in combat. The one who made the head protects it.

9. The verb *tafeq* ('to bring forth, to promote, to advance') is rare. The psalmist asks God to block the execution of the wicked's plans. The phrase *yarumu* ('they would rise, they would be exalted') warns of the consequence: if God does not intervene, the wicked will be elevated — the moral order will be inverted.
10. The word *amal* ('trouble, toil, mischief') describes the harmful effect of the enemies' speech. The prayer that it 'cover them' reverses the direction of harm — what was aimed outward falls back on the speaker. This is a standard pattern in imprecatory psalms: the psalmist prays not for arbitrary punishment but for the reversal of the enemy's own schemes.
11. The images escalate: *gechalim* ('burning coals') falling from above, *esh* ('fire') consuming, and *mahamorot* ('deep pits, flooded trenches') trapping below. The three-fold judgment attacks from every direction — above, around, and below. The phrase *bal yaqumu* ('let them not rise') seals the judgment as final. The burning coals echo the judgment of Sodom (Genesis 19:24) and the theophany language of Psalm 18:12-13.
12. The image of evil itself hunting the violent person is one of the most striking in the Psalms. Evil is personified as a predator that turns on its master. The violent person who hunted others with traps (v. 6) is now the prey. The *lex talionis* is cosmic: the universe itself enforces the return of violence to its source.
13. The pairing of *ani* ('afflicted, humble, poor') and *evyon* ('destitute, needy') represents the most vulnerable members of society — those with no advocate, no power, no legal standing. The LORD serves as their advocate, their judge, and their defender. This is the consistent claim of the Psalms: God's court favors those whom human courts ignore.
14. The movement from the psalm's opening cry ('Rescue me!') to its closing vision ('the upright will dwell in Your presence') maps the arc of the entire psalm: from danger to safety, from enemies to God, from the trap-lined path to the divine dwelling place. The verb *yeshvu* ('will dwell') is the same root as the 'sitting' of Psalm 137:1 ('there we sat') — but now the sitting is in God's presence, not by Babylon's rivers.

141

Summary: *A psalm of David. An evening prayer in which the psalmist asks the LORD to accept his prayer like incense and his lifted hands like the evening grain offering. He pleads for God to guard his mouth, keep his heart from evil, and prevent him from sharing in the feasts of the wicked. He welcomes correction from the righteous as an act of faithful love. The psalm concludes with a declaration of trust in the LORD even as the psalmist faces danger — his eyes are fixed on God, and he asks not to be left defenseless while the wicked fall into their own traps.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The identification of prayer with incense and lifted hands with the evening offering (minchah) is one of the most theologically significant equations in the Psalter. It suggests that personal prayer can function as a substitute for temple sacrifice — an idea that became foundational for Jewish worship after the destruction of the Second Temple. The psalm moves from the mouth (v. 3) to the heart (v. 4) to the head (v. 5), tracing the anatomy of temptation from speech to desire to action. The request for the righteous to strike and correct him (v. 5) is remarkable for its willingness to receive painful truth from allies rather than pleasant company from the wicked.*

Translation Friction: *Verses 5-7 are among the most textually difficult in the Psalter. The Hebrew is compressed, allusive, and in several places the Masoretic Text appears corrupt or at least highly obscure. Verse 6 — about judges being thrown down by the sides of a rock — has generated widely divergent translations. The metaphor in verse 7 about bones scattered at the mouth of Sheol is violent and abrupt. Whether the psalmist is describing his own condition or the fate of the wicked is debated. The traditional ascription to David fits the tone of personal danger and the pattern of asking for protection against enemies who set traps.*

Connections: *The incense imagery connects to Exodus 30:7-8, where Aaron burns incense on the golden altar every morning and evening — a perpetual fragrance before the LORD. Revelation 5:8 and 8:3-4 pick up this image, identifying the prayers of the saints with golden bowls of incense. The request to guard the mouth echoes Psalm 39:1, where David resolves to muzzle his mouth in the presence of the wicked. The trap imagery in verse 9 is a standard wisdom motif: the wicked fall into the pit they dug (Psalm 7:15, Proverbs 26:27).*

¹A psalm of David.

LORD, I call to you — come quickly to me.

Listen to my voice when I call to you.

²Let my prayer stand as incense before you,
my lifted hands as the evening offering.

³Set a guard over my mouth, LORD.
Keep watch over the door of my lips.

⁴Do not let my heart turn toward anything evil,
to engage in wicked deeds
with those who practice wrongdoing.
Let me not feast on their delicacies.

⁵Let the righteous strike me — it is faithful love.
Let him correct me — it is oil for the head.
Let my head not refuse it,
for my prayer continues even against their evils.

⁶Their rulers will be thrown down along the rocky cliffs,
and they will hear my words, for they are pleasant.

⁷Like one who plows and splits open the earth,
our bones lie scattered at the mouth of Sheol.

⁸But my eyes are on you, LORD, my Lord.
In you I take refuge.
Do not pour out my life.

⁹Guard me from the jaws of the trap they have set for me,
and from the snares of those who do evil.

¹⁰Let the wicked fall into their own nets,
while I pass by safely.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb *chushah* ('hurry, make haste') conveys urgency — this is not a contemplative meditation but a cry for immediate help. The doubled reference to calling (*qeratikha... be-qori lakh*) frames the verse as an insistent summons.
2. The *minchah* ('grain offering, tribute, present') is the evening sacrifice offered in the temple each day at twilight. The word can also mean 'gift' or 'tribute' in non-cultic contexts. By pairing incense with the evening offering, the psalmist places his prayer within the temple's daily rhythm — this is an evening psalm.
3. The word *shomrah* ('guard, watch') pictures a sentry stationed at the mouth. The *dal* ('door') of the lips extends the architectural metaphor — the mouth is a gate that needs guarding. The psalmist recognizes that his tongue is a point of vulnerability, especially in the company of the wicked (v. 4). This request moves from external danger to internal discipline.
4. The verb *al tat* ('do not incline, do not turn') asks God to prevent the heart's drift — the psalmist knows the pull of evil is subtle. The phrase *lehitolel alilot be-resha* ('to busy oneself with deeds in wickedness') uses a reflexive verb suggesting complicity: getting involved, entangling oneself. The *man'ammim* ('delicacies, pleasant foods') of the wicked represent the seductive rewards of joining their company. The movement from mouth (v. 3) to heart (v. 4) traces temptation to its source.
5. This verse is notoriously difficult in Hebrew. The verb *yehalemeni* ('let him strike me') is from *halam* ('to strike, to hammer'). Reading the righteous person's correction as chesed rather than cruelty is a hallmark of wisdom thinking (Proverbs 27:6: 'Faithful are the wounds of a friend'). The second half of the verse is textually uncertain; our rendering follows the Masoretic accentuation while acknowledging that the Hebrew is compressed to the point of ambiguity.
6. The verb *nishmetu* ('they will be dropped, thrown down') is from *shamat* ('to release, to let fall'). The phrase *bi-yede sela* ('by the hands/sides of the rock/cliff') is obscure — it may refer to execution by being thrown from a cliff or to the collapse of authority. The second line shifts abruptly: when the

wicked's leaders fall, the survivors will finally listen to the psalmist's words and find them pleasant (na'emu). The verse anticipates vindication: the psalmist's rejected counsel will eventually be recognized as true.

7. The simile compares scattered bones to clods of earth turned up by plowing — the image is of violent disruption. The phrase *lefi She'ol* ('at the mouth of Sheol') places the psalmist and his companions at the very edge of death. Whether 'our bones' refers to the righteous community or is a dramatic way of describing the psalmist's own peril is uncertain. The verse is one of the darkest in this psalm, picturing the faithful as broken and exposed.
8. The double address YHVH Adonai ('LORD, my Lord') intensifies the appeal. The verb *chasiti* ('I have taken refuge') is from *chasah*, a key Psalms verb for sheltering under God's protection. The phrase *al te'ar nafshi* ('do not empty/pour out my soul') uses a verb meaning to strip bare or make naked — do not leave me exposed, defenseless, emptied of life.
9. The *pach* ('trap, snare') and *moqeshot* ('snares, lures') are hunting terms applied to human enemies — the psalmist is the prey, and the wicked are hunters. The verb *yaqeshu* ('they have laid') is from *yaqosh* ('to set a snare'). The psalm consistently pictures the wicked as those who trap rather than confront directly.
10. The *makmorav* ('his nets') uses the singular suffix — possibly referring to each wicked person's own trap, or to the collective trap that rebounds on its makers. The reversal of the trap is a recurring motif in the Psalter (Psalm 35:8, 57:6). The final word *e'evor* ('I pass by, I cross over') pictures the psalmist walking past the danger unharmed, a quiet image of deliverance.

142

Summary: *A maskil of David, when he was in the cave. A prayer of desperate isolation. David cries out to the LORD, pouring out his complaint and declaring that God alone knows his path. He looks to his right and finds no one — no one cares for his life. He declares the LORD to be his refuge and his portion in the land of the living. He asks for rescue from his pursuers, who are stronger than he is. The psalm ends with a plea to be brought out of prison so that the righteous may gather around him in celebration of God's generosity.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This is one of two psalms with a cave superscription (the other is Psalm 57). The cave setting — whether Adullam (1 Samuel 22) or En-gedi (1 Samuel 24) — transforms the psalm from abstract lament into concrete geography. A cave is both refuge and prison: it hides David from Saul but also confines him in darkness. The psalmist's statement 'You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living' (v. 5) uses language normally reserved for the Levitical inheritance — the LORD is David's allotted share, his territory, when he has no territory of his own. The final verse pictures a crown (*yachtiru*) of righteous people surrounding the delivered psalmist, turning rescue into communal worship.*

Translation Friction: *The superscription 'when he was in the cave' places this psalm in David's fugitive period, but the specific cave is not identified. The word *maskil* in the heading is debated — it may mean 'contemplative poem,' 'skillful song,' or 'instructive psalm.' Verse 7 uses the word *masger* ('prison, enclosure'), which some read literally and others as a metaphor for the cave or for the psalmist's overall trapped condition. The statement 'no one cares for my life' (*ein doresh le-nafshi*, v. 4) is striking given that David had loyal followers even in the cave — the psalm may capture a moment of subjective despair rather than objective abandonment.*

Connections: *The cave narratives appear in 1 Samuel 22:1 (cave of Adullam) and 1 Samuel 24:3 (cave at En-gedi). Psalm 57 shares the cave setting and similar themes of refuge amid danger. The language of 'portion' (*cheleg*) in verse 5 connects to the Levitical theology of Numbers 18:20, where the LORD tells Aaron, 'I am your portion.' The gathering of the righteous in verse 7 anticipates the communal thanksgiving psalms where rescue is reported to the assembly (Psalm 22:22, 40:9-10).*

¹A maskil of David, when he was in the cave. A prayer.
With my voice I cry out to the LORD.
With my voice I plead with the LORD for mercy.

²I pour out my complaint before him.
I declare my distress before him.

³When my spirit grows faint within me,
you know my path.
Along the road where I walk
they have hidden a trap for me.

⁴Look to my right and see —
there is no one who recognizes me.
Every escape route is gone from me.
No one cares about my life.

⁵I cry out to you, LORD.
I say, "You are my refuge,
my portion in the land of the living."

⁶Pay attention to my cry,
for I have been brought very low.
Rescue me from those who pursue me,
for they are stronger than I am.

⁷Bring me out of this prison
so that I may give thanks to your name.
The righteous will gather around me,
for you will deal generously with me.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The WLC includes the superscription as verse 1. The word *maskil* likely derives from *sakal* ('to be prudent, to give insight') and may indicate a psalm intended for instruction or contemplation. The doubled phrase *be-qoli* ('with my voice') emphasizes vocal, audible prayer — this is not silent meditation but a cry that echoes off cave walls. The verb *etchannan* ('I plead for grace') is from *chanan*, the root of 'grace' and 'mercy.'
2. The verb *eshpokh* ('I pour out') pictures prayer as liquid — the psalmist empties himself of grief before God. The word *sichi* ('my complaint, my meditation, my concern') can mean inner musing or outward complaint; here the parallel with *tsarati* ('my distress') favors the sense of pouring out trouble. The repetition of *lefanav* ('before him') insists that this outpouring is directed — it has an audience.
3. The verb *hit'atef* ('to be wrapped, to be faint, to be overwhelmed') pictures the spirit as wrapped in a shroud of exhaustion — unable to see, unable to breathe. The contrast is stark: when the psalmist cannot see his own way, God knows his path (*netivati*). The trap (*pach*) hidden along the road echoes Psalm 141:9 and the broader pattern of enemies as hunters.
4. The right side (*yamin*) is the place of honor and protection. Looking to the right and finding no one is an image of judicial and military abandonment — no advocate and no guard. The threefold absence (no one who recognizes, no escape, no one who cares) builds to a climax of isolation that makes the turn to God in verse 5 all the more dramatic.
5. The term *cheleq* ('portion') carries Levitical overtones — the Levites received no territorial inheritance because the LORD was their portion (Numbers 18:20, Deuteronomy 10:9). David, stripped of everything, adopts the Levitical posture: God alone is enough.
6. The verb *dalloti* ('I am brought low, I am impoverished') is from *dalal* ('to be low, weak, thin, poor'). It is the language of depletion — David is not merely threatened but diminished. The admission that his pursuers are stronger (*amtsu*, from *amats*, 'to be strong, to overpower') is a statement of military reality that drives the need for divine intervention.
7. The *masger* ('prison') may be literal (a dungeon) or metaphorical (the cave, the life of a fugitive). In this context the cave functions as both shelter and prison. The verb *yaktiru* is from *katar* (Hiphil), meaning 'to surround' or possibly 'to crown' — the righteous community will encircle the freed psalmist in a wreath of fellowship.

143

Summary: *A psalm of David. The last of the seven traditional penitential psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143). David pleads for the LORD to hear his prayer and not enter into judgment with him, because no living person is righteous before God. An enemy has crushed him into darkness. His spirit is faint, his heart stunned. He remembers the LORD's past deeds, stretches out his hands like dry ground thirsting for rain, and begs for a swift answer. He asks God to teach him the right path, to rescue him from enemies, and to lead him by the good Spirit on level ground.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Verse 2 contains one of the Hebrew Bible's most sweeping theological statements: 'Do not enter into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you.' This is not a confession of specific sin but a declaration about the human condition itself — even a servant of God cannot survive the scrutiny of divine justice. The psalm builds on this foundation: if no one is righteous, then rescue must come from God's faithful love and righteousness, not from the psalmist's merit. The image in verse 6 of hands stretched out toward God like parched land toward rain is one of the Psalter's most vivid pictures of spiritual thirst. The request for God's 'good Spirit' to lead on level ground (v. 10) is one of the rare explicit mentions of the Spirit as a guiding, moral presence.*

Translation Friction: *The superscription ascribes this to David, and the language of being pursued by an enemy (v. 3) fits several periods of David's life. The psalm's classification as penitential is somewhat loose — it does not contain explicit confession of sin but rather a general acknowledgment that no human can stand before God's judgment. Verse 12 asks God to destroy the psalmist's enemies 'in your faithful love' (be-chasdekha) — the juxtaposition of chesed with the destruction of enemies challenges modern assumptions about love and justice being opposites.*

Connections: *Verse 2 anticipates Paul's argument in Romans 3:20 that 'by works of the law no flesh will be justified before him.' The thirst imagery of verse 6 connects to Psalm 63:1 ('my soul thirsts for you in a dry and weary land') and to Jesus's invitation in John 7:37 ('if anyone thirsts, let him come to me'). The 'good Spirit' of verse 10 echoes Nehemiah 9:20 ('you gave your good Spirit to instruct them') and anticipates the Spirit as guide in the New Testament (Romans 8:14, Galatians 5:18).*

¹A psalm of David.

LORD, hear my prayer.

Listen to my pleas for mercy.

In your faithfulness, answer me —
in your righteousness.

²Do not bring your servant into judgment,
for no one alive is righteous before you.

³For the enemy has pursued my life.
He has crushed my existence to the ground.
He has made me sit in darkness
like those long dead.

⁴My spirit grows faint within me.
My heart inside me is stunned.

⁵I remember the days of old.
I meditate on all your works.
I reflect on what your hands have done.

⁶I stretch out my hands to you.
My soul is like parched ground thirsting for you.
Selah.

⁷Answer me quickly, LORD — my spirit is failing.
Do not hide your face from me,
or I will become like those who go down to the pit.

⁸Let me hear your faithful love in the morning,
for I trust in you.
Show me the path I should walk,
for I lift up my soul to you.

⁹Rescue me from my enemies, LORD.
I have hidden myself in you.

¹⁰Teach me to do your will,
for you are my God.
Let your good Spirit lead me
on level ground.

¹¹For the sake of your name, LORD, give me life.
In your righteousness, bring my soul out of distress.

¹²In your faithful love, silence my enemies.
Destroy all who oppress my life,
for I am your servant.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The psalm opens with two appeals to two divine attributes: *emunah* ('faithfulness, reliability, firmness') and *tsedaqah* ('righteousness'). The psalmist does not ground his appeal in his own worthiness but in God's character. The word *tachanunai* ('my pleas for mercy') is from *chanan* ('to be gracious') — these are not demands but supplications thrown on the mercy of a faithful God.
2. The phrase *kol chai* ('all living, every living one') is absolute — no exceptions. This verse will be echoed in the apostle Paul's argument in Romans 3:20 and Galatians 2:16, where justification by works of the law is declared impossible. The psalmist has preemptively dismantled any claim to self-righteousness before the psalm even unfolds its petitions.
3. The verb *dikka* ('he has crushed') is from *daka*, a strong verb implying pulverization — not merely defeat but destruction. The phrase *be-machashakkim* ('in dark places') echoes Lamentations 3:6 ('He has made me dwell in darkness like the dead of long ago'). The comparison *ke-metei olam* ('like the dead of eternity/antiquity') places the psalmist among those who have been in Sheol so long they are forgotten. He is alive but living the experience of the dead.
4. The verb *tit'atfe* ('it grows faint, it is wrapped') describes the spirit as enshrouded — wrapped in weakness as in a garment. The verb *yishtomem* ('is stunned, is desolate, is appalled') is from *shamem*, the root behind 'desolation.' The heart is not merely sad but paralyzed with shock. Together the two verbs describe a complete internal collapse: the spirit cannot breathe, and the heart cannot think.
5. The three verbs — *zakharti* ('I remember'), *hagiti* ('I meditate'), *asacheach* ('I reflect, I muse') — describe a deliberate exercise of memory against despair. The psalmist counters the darkness of verse 3 by turning his mind to God's past actions. The *yamim mi-qedem* ('days from of old') may refer to personal experience of God's help or to the great acts of Israel's history — Exodus, wilderness provision, conquest.
6. The comparison of the soul to parched land is one of the Psalter's most powerful metaphors for spiritual thirst. The word *ayefah* ('weary, faint') describes exhaustion beyond mere tiredness — the land has nothing left to give. The hands stretched out mirror the cracked ground open to the sky. The *selah* likely indicates a musical interlude or liturgical pause.
7. The verb *kaltah* ('it is consumed, it is finished') from *kalah* describes the spirit reaching its end — total depletion. The hidden face of God (*hester panim*) is one of the Hebrew Bible's most terrifying images: when God turns away, life drains out. The *bor* ('pit, cistern') is a synonym for Sheol, the realm of the dead. The psalmist is saying: your silence is killing me. Speed is existential — delay means death.

8. The morning (boqer) is when the darkness breaks — the psalmist who sits in darkness like the long-dead (v. 3) asks for faithful love to arrive with the dawn. The verb hashmi'eni ('cause me to hear') asks for an audible, perceivable experience of chesed — not abstract knowledge but morning-breaking awareness. The phrase nasati nafshi ('I lift up my soul') pictures the soul held up to God like an offering or like a child reaching upward.
9. The verb kissiti ('I have covered myself, I have hidden') is from kasah ('to cover'). The psalmist has taken cover in God — not in a cave, not in a fortress, but in God himself. This is the practical application of verse 8's trust: the psalmist has already committed to God as his hiding place and now asks God to act on that commitment.
10. The phrase ruchakha tovah ('your good Spirit') is one of the Hebrew Bible's clearest references to the Spirit of God as a moral and directional guide. The same phrase appears in Nehemiah 9:20. The word mishor ('level ground, plain, equity') combines geography and ethics — level ground is both a safe landscape and a metaphor for just, straightforward living.
11. The appeal lema'an shimkha ('for the sake of your name') shifts the ground from the psalmist's need to God's reputation — God's name is at stake in the fate of his servant. The verb techayeni ('give me life, revive me') is from chayah ('to live') and asks for more than survival; it asks for restoration to full, vigorous life. The tsedaqah of verse 1 returns here as the means of deliverance.
12. The juxtaposition of chesed ('faithful love') with tatsmit ('you will cut off, silence, destroy') is jarring to modern ears but coherent within the psalm's logic: faithful love toward the servant requires the removal of those who seek to destroy him. The verb tatsmit (Hiphil of tsamat) means 'to put to silence, to annihilate.' The psalm ends where it began — with the word avdekha ('your servant'), framing the entire prayer as a servant's appeal to his master.

144

Summary: *A psalm of David. A royal warrior's hymn that blesses the LORD as the one who trains David's hands for battle.*

The psalm moves from military thanksgiving to a meditation on human smallness before God, then to a dramatic plea for divine intervention — the heavens torn open, mountains smoking, lightning scattering the enemies. David asks to be rescued from foreign adversaries whose mouths speak lies and whose right hands swear false oaths. The psalm concludes with a vision of national blessing: strong sons, beautiful daughters, full storehouses, abundant flocks, no breach in the walls, no cry of alarm in the streets. 'Happy is the people whose God is the LORD.'

What Makes This Remarkable: *This psalm draws heavily from earlier psalms — particularly Psalm 18 (= 2 Samuel 22) and Psalm 8 — weaving their language into a new composition. The question 'What is a human being that you take notice of him?' (v. 3) echoes Psalm 8:4, but where Psalm 8 marvels at human dignity, Psalm 144 emphasizes human frailty: a person is like a breath (hevel), like a passing shadow. The theophany in verses 5-8 compresses Psalm 18's storm-god imagery into a concentrated plea. The prosperity vision in verses 12-15 is unique in the Psalter — nowhere else does a psalm paint so detailed a picture of agricultural, domestic, and civic flourishing. The final beatitude ties all this abundance to one cause: the people's God is the LORD.*

Translation Friction: *The relationship between this psalm and its source texts (Psalms 18 and 8) has led some scholars to view it as a late anthology piece rather than an original Davidic composition. The shift from military language (vv. 1-8) to domestic prosperity (vv. 12-15) is abrupt, and some argue that verses 12-15 were originally a separate poem. The phrase bene nekhar ('sons of foreigners/strangers') in verses 7 and 11 may refer to foreign enemies or to treacherous people within Israel who act like foreigners — their false speech and lying oaths suggest covenant disloyalty.*

Connections: *Verse 1 echoes Psalm 18:34 (training hands for war). Verse 3 echoes Psalm 8:4 (what is a human being?). The theophany imagery in verses 5-7 draws from Psalm 18:9-16 and from the Sinai tradition (Exodus 19:18). The prosperity blessings of verses 12-15 connect to the covenant blessings of Deuteronomy 28:1-14. The final declaration — 'Happy is the people whose God is the LORD' — echoes Psalm 33:12 and anticipates the beatitude theology of the Psalter's final section.*

Of David.

Blessed be the LORD, my rock,
who trains my hands for battle,
my fingers for war.

²My faithful love and my fortress,
my stronghold and my rescuer,
my shield — the one in whom I take refuge,
who subdues peoples under me.

³LORD, what is a human being that you notice him,
a mortal's child that you consider him?

⁴A human being is like a breath.
His days are like a passing shadow.

⁵LORD, bend your heavens and come down.
Touch the mountains and they will smoke.

⁶Flash your lightning and scatter them.
Send out your arrows and throw them into confusion.

⁷Reach down your hands from on high.
Snatch me up and rescue me from the great waters,
from the hand of foreigners,

⁸whose mouths speak lies
and whose right hand is a right hand of deception.

⁹God, I will sing a new song to you.
On the ten-stringed harp I will make music to you.

¹⁰The one who gives victory to kings,
who rescues David his servant from the deadly sword —

¹¹Snatch me up and rescue me
from the hand of foreigners,
whose mouths speak lies
and whose right hand is a right hand of deception.

¹²Then our sons will be like young plants,
fully grown in their youth.
Our daughters will be like carved pillars,
shaped for the design of a palace.

¹³Our storehouses will be full,
overflowing with every kind of produce.
Our flocks will multiply by thousands,
by tens of thousands in our open fields.

¹⁴Our cattle will be heavy with young.
There will be no breach in the wall,
no going out to exile,
no cry of alarm in our public squares.

¹⁵Happy is the people who have it so.
Happy is the people whose God is the LORD.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The word *tsuri* ('my rock') establishes the LORD as the immovable foundation for military action. The parallel between 'hands for battle' and 'fingers for war' moves from the broad (hands grasping weapons) to the precise (fingers drawing bowstrings, fitting arrows). The psalm opens with the recognition that military skill is not self-generated but God-given.
2. The cascade of military metaphors — *chesed*, *metsudah*, *misgav*, *mefalti*, *magen* — piles up titles for God as warrior-protector. The opening word *chasdi* ('my faithful love') is unusual: God is addressed not merely as the source of *chesed* but as *chesed* itself — 'my faithful love personified.' The verb *ha-roded* ('who subdues, who tramples down') pictures military subjugation. Some manuscripts read *ammi* ('my people') while others read *ammim* ('peoples/nations').
3. The parallelism *adam* / *ben enosh* ('human being / son of mortal') uses two words for humanity that emphasize creatureliness. *Adam* is from *adamah* ('ground'); *enosh* is from a root suggesting weakness or mortality. The verbs *teda'ehu* ('you know him') and *techashvehu* ('you consider him, you reckon him') suggest that God actively turns attention toward humans — it is not automatic but chosen.
4. The word *hevel* ('breath, vapor, futility') is the signature word of Ecclesiastes. Here it describes the sheer insubstantiality of human life — not its meaninglessness but its brevity. The *tsel over* ('passing shadow') intensifies the point: not even a stationary shadow but one that moves and disappears as the sun shifts. The two images work together: breath dissipates, shadow passes. Human life has the permanence of neither.
5. The verb *hat* ('bend, stretch, incline') pictures God physically bending the sky downward to descend — the heavens are a canopy that God pushes aside to enter the world. The smoking mountains echo Sinai (Exodus 19:18), where the LORD's presence made the mountain burn. The psalm shifts from reflection on human frailty to a demand for theophany: come down and act.
6. Lightning (*baraq*) and arrows (*chitsim*) are God's weapons — the storm is a divine armory. The verb *tetifsem* ('scatter them') and *tehumem* ('confuse them, throw them into panic') describe the disintegration of enemy forces under divine assault. The imagery draws directly from Psalm 18:14.
7. The *mayim rabbim* ('great waters, many waters') are chaos waters — the primordial flood that threatens to overwhelm. The *bene nekhar* ('sons of foreignness, foreigners') are enemies defined by their outsider status. The plea combines cosmic imagery (floodwaters) with political reality (foreign enemies), asking God to intervene at both levels.
8. The *shav* ('emptiness, falsehood, deception') and *sheqer* ('falsehood, lie') describe enemies whose speech and oaths are unreliable. The right hand (*yamin*) raised in oath-taking or treaty-making is a 'right hand of falsehood' — they swear and break, they promise and betray. The verse defines the enemy not by military power but by dishonesty.
9. The *shir chadash* ('new song') is prompted by new deliverance — the song matches the freshness of the rescue. The *nevel asor* ('ten-stringed harp') is a specific instrument of praise. The vow to sing is anticipatory — the psalmist commits to future praise before the rescue is complete, an act of faith that treats God's answer as already given.
10. The word *teshu'ah* ('salvation, victory, deliverance') here means military victory — God is the one who decides the outcome of battle for kings. David names himself in the third person as God's servant (*avdo*), a title of honor in royal theology. The *cherev ra'ah* ('evil sword, deadly sword') is the weapon of the enemy from which God extracts his servant.
11. This verse repeats verses 7b-8 almost verbatim, forming a refrain. The repetition brackets the vow of praise (vv. 9-10) and transitions into the prosperity vision of verses 12-15. The effect is structural: the plea for rescue frames the promise of worship and leads into the picture of blessing that rescue will make possible.
12. The *zaviyyot* ('corner-pillars') have been translated variously as 'corner stones,' 'carved figures,' or 'caryatids' (sculpted female columns supporting a building). The image is of both beauty and structural importance — these daughters are load-bearing, not ornamental. The word *hekhal* can mean 'palace' or 'temple,' suggesting that the blessed household reflects divine architecture.
13. The *mezavenu* ('our storehouses, our granaries') are full and *mefiqim* ('producing, yielding, overflowing') from one kind (*zan*) to another — the abundance is diverse, not monocultural. The flocks are *ma'alifot* ('producing thousands') and *merubbavot* ('producing ten thousands') — exponential multiplication. The word *chutsotenu* ('our streets, our open places') likely refers to open pastureland rather than city streets.
14. The *allufenu mesubbalim* ('our cattle loaded/burdened') likely means heavy with calf — the animals are productive and healthy. The three negations paint peace by what is absent: *ein perets* ('no breach' — no enemy breaking through the wall), *ein yotse't* ('no going out' — no forced march into exile or sortie from a besieged city), *ein tsevahah* ('no screaming, no cry of distress') in the open squares. Peace is defined as the absence of catastrophe.
15. The word *ashre* ('happy, blessed, fortunate') is the same word that opens the Psalter in Psalm 1:1. Its appearance here near the end of the Psalter creates an inclusion: the happiness of the righteous individual in Psalm 1 is now extended to the entire nation. The double use of *ashre* creates emphasis — happiness is declared twice, each time with a different (and deepening) ground.

145

Summary: *A tehillah (praise-song) of David — the only psalm in the Psalter given this title, from which the entire Hebrew collection gets its name (Tehillim, 'Praises'). This is an acrostic psalm: each verse begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet, from aleph to tav. David extols the LORD's greatness, mighty deeds, splendor, and faithfulness across generations. The psalm declares that the LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and great in faithful love. God sustains all who fall, opens his hand to satisfy every living thing, is near to all who call on him in truth, and guards all who love him. The psalm closes with a vow of perpetual praise and a call for all flesh to bless God's holy name forever.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 145 is the last psalm ascribed to David and the only one given the heading tehillah ('praise') — a singular form of the word that names the entire book. This is David's final word in the Psalter, and it is pure, unqualified praise. The acrostic structure (aleph through tav) is a literary statement: praise covers the entire alphabet, from first letter to last, leaving nothing out. The Masoretic Text is missing the nun line (which would fall between verses 13 and 14), but the Dead Sea Scrolls (11QPsa) preserve it: 'The LORD is faithful in all his words and gracious in all his deeds.' Jewish liturgical tradition has made this psalm central to daily worship — it is recited three times daily in traditional services, and the Talmud (Berakhot 4b) states that anyone who recites Psalm 145 three times a day is assured a place in the world to come.*

Translation Friction: *The missing nun verse in the Masoretic Text is the psalm's most discussed textual issue. The Dead Sea Scroll 11QPsa supplies: ne'eman YHVH be-kol devarav ve-chasid be-kol ma'asav ('the LORD is faithful in all his words and gracious in all his deeds'). Whether this line was accidentally dropped by a scribe or deliberately omitted is debated. The acrostic structure makes the omission conspicuous. Our rendering includes the nun line following the Dead Sea Scrolls evidence, marked with a note. The psalm's theology is relentlessly positive — there is no lament, no enemy, no suffering. Some scholars see this as the psalm's weakness; others see it as its purpose: after 144 psalms of mixed experience, David's final word is undiluted praise.*

Connections: *The declaration in verse 8 — 'The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and great in faithful love' — is a direct quotation of the LORD's self-revelation at Sinai (Exodus 34:6-7), the most quoted verse within the Hebrew Bible itself. The feeding imagery in verse 15-16 ('the eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time') is echoed by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:26). The promise that God is near to all who call on him (v. 18) is cited by Paul in Romans 10:12-13. As the last Davidic psalm, it serves as a bridge to the five Halleluyah psalms (146-150) that close the Psalter.*

¹A praise of David.

I will exalt you, my God, the King,
and I will bless your name forever and always.

²Every day I will bless you,
and I will praise your name forever and always.

³Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised.
His greatness is beyond searching out.

⁴One generation will commend your works to the next,
and they will declare your mighty acts.

⁵The splendor of your glorious majesty
and the accounts of your wonders — I will meditate on them.

⁶They will speak of the power of your awe-inspiring deeds,
and I will recount your greatness.

⁷They will pour out the memory of your abundant goodness
and will sing aloud of your righteousness.

⁸The LORD is gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger and great in faithful love.

⁹The LORD is good to all,
and his compassion extends over everything he has made.

¹⁰All your works will give thanks to you, LORD,
and your faithful ones will bless you.

¹¹They will speak of the glory of your kingdom
and tell of your power,

¹²making known to all people his mighty acts
and the glorious splendor of his kingdom.

¹³Your kingdom is a kingdom of all ages,
and your dominion endures through every generation.

¹⁴The LORD upholds all who fall
and lifts up all who are bowed down.

¹⁵The eyes of all look to you with hope,
and you give them their food at the right time.

¹⁶You open your hand
and satisfy the desire of every living thing.

¹⁷The LORD is righteous in all his ways
and faithful in all his works.

¹⁸The LORD is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.

¹⁹He fulfills the desire of those who fear him.
He hears their cry and saves them.

²⁰The LORD guards all who love him,
but all the wicked he will destroy.

²¹My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD,
and let all flesh bless his holy name
forever and always.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The heading *tehillah* ('praise') is unique in the Psalter — no other psalm carries this title, yet the entire collection is called *Tehillim* ('Praises') after this word. The aleph-verse begins with *aromimkha* ('I will exalt you, I will lift you high'), establishing the psalm's singular purpose: elevation of God. The

address Elohai ha-Melekh ('my God, the King') combines personal devotion with royal theology.

2. The bet-verse. The phrase be-khol yom ('every day, in all days') commits the psalmist to daily, uninterrupted praise. The doubled temporal markers — 'every day' and 'forever and always' (le-olam va-ed) — stretch praise from the immediate present into eternity.
3. The gimel-verse. The adjective gadol ('great') and the noun gedullatah ('his greatness') create a wordplay rooted in the same consonants. The phrase ein cheqer ('there is no searching out, no investigation that can reach the end') declares that God's greatness exceeds the capacity of human comprehension. Praise is the only adequate response to what cannot be fully understood.
4. The dalet-verse. The phrase dor le-dor ('generation to generation') establishes praise as an inheritance — each generation passes on the testimony of God's deeds to the next. The verb yeshabbach ('will commend, will praise') and yaggidu ('they will declare, recount') describe an active tradition of telling.
5. The he-verse. The phrase hadar kevod hodekha ('the splendor of the glory of your majesty') piles three words for magnificence: hadar ('splendor, ornament'), kavod ('glory, weight, honor'), and hod ('majesty, splendor'). The psalmist's response is sichah ('meditation, musing, reflection') — the wonders of God are not merely recited but pondered.
6. The vav-verse. The word ezuz ('strength, fierceness, power') combined with norotekha ('your awesome/fearsome deeds') describes actions that evoke both terror and reverence. The shift from 'they will speak' to 'I will recount' moves between communal testimony and personal declaration.
7. The zayin-verse. The verb yabbi'u ('they will pour out, bubble forth, gush') pictures speech as an overflowing spring — the memory of God's goodness cannot be contained. The rav tuvkhah ('your abundant goodness, your great goodness') is paired with tsidqatkhah ('your righteousness'), connecting God's generosity with his justice.
8. This four-part formula appears in Exodus 34:6, Joel 2:13, Jonah 4:2, Nahum 1:3, Nehemiah 9:17, and several psalms. It is the most internally quoted verse in the Hebrew Bible — the theological center from which Israel's understanding of God radiates. The psalmist is not innovating but repeating the foundational creed.
9. The tet-verse. The scope is universal: la-kol ('to all') and al kol ma'asav ('over all his works'). God's goodness is not restricted to Israel but covers the entire creation. The rachamav ('his compassion, his tender mercies') — from the same womb-root as rachum in verse 8 — rests on everything God has made. This is one of the Hebrew Bible's most expansive statements of divine benevolence.
10. The yod-verse. The parallel moves from kol ma'asekha ('all your works' — the entire creation) to chasidekha ('your faithful ones, your devoted ones') — from the broadest circle of praise to the inner circle. The chasidim are those who embody chesed in their own lives, the people marked by covenant loyalty.
11. The kaf-verse. The kevod malkhutekha ('glory of your kingdom') introduces the theme of divine kingship that dominates this section. The faithful ones are not passive recipients of blessing but active heralds — they speak (yomeru) and tell (yedabberu) of God's royal power.
12. The lamed-verse. The purpose of the faithful ones' testimony is lehodia ('to make known') — the knowledge of God's kingdom is not for insiders only but is directed outward to bene ha-adam ('the children of humanity'). The kevod hadar malkhuto ('the glory of the splendor of his kingdom') again piles up magnificence — three words for the weight and beauty of God's reign.
13. The Dead Sea Scroll 11QPSa includes a nun-line after this verse that is absent from the Masoretic Text: ne'eman YHVH be-khol devarav ve-chasid be-khol ma'asav ('The LORD is faithful in all his words and gracious in all his deeds'). The acrostic pattern requires a nun-line, and its absence in MT is likely a scribal omission. We note its existence without inserting it into the verse numbering.
14. The samekh-verse. The verb somekh ('upholds, supports, sustains') pictures God as a hand under the one who is falling — not preventing the fall but catching the fallen. The parallel zoqef ('raises up, straightens') reverses the posture of the kefufim ('the bowed down, the bent over'). Together the two verbs describe God's consistent action toward the weak: he catches and he straightens.
15. The ayin-verse. The verb yesabberu ('they look with hope, they wait expectantly') pictures all creation turning its eyes upward to God as the source of provision. The phrase be-itto ('in its time, at the right time') indicates that God's provision follows a rhythm — not arbitrary but timed to need. Jesus echoes this verse in Matthew 6:26.
16. This verse is central to Jewish table liturgy — it is recited as part of the blessing after meals (Birkat Hamazon). The image of the open hand has become one of Judaism's defining metaphors for divine provision.
17. The tsade-verse. The parallel tsaddiq / chasid ('righteous / faithful, devoted') applies to God the same qualities expected of his people. The word chasid when applied to God means 'loyal, devoted, full of chesed' — everything God does is saturated with covenant faithfulness. The universality — be-khol ('in all') repeated twice — leaves no exception.
18. The qof-verse. The word qarov ('near, close') declares God's accessibility — he is not remote or indifferent. The qualifier be-emet ('in truth, genuinely, with integrity') distinguishes sincere calling from mere ritual invocation. God is near, but nearness responds to authenticity. Paul cites this theology in Romans 10:12-13.
19. The resh-verse. The retson yere'av ('the desire/will of those who fear him') echoes the ratson ('desire') of verse 16, but now applied specifically to those who stand in reverent awe of God. The three verbs — ya'aseh ('he does/fulfills'), yishma ('he hears'), yoshi'em ('he saves them') — form a rapid sequence: God acts, God listens, God delivers.

- 20.** The shin-verse. The verb *shomer* ('guards, keeps, watches over') promises protection to all who love God — love, not merely fear, is the relationship described. The contrast is stark: the same God who guards those who love him will destroy (*yashmid*, Hiphil of *shamad*) all the wicked. The psalm does not soften this; divine love and divine justice are both absolute.
- 21.** The inclusio between verse 1 ('I will bless your name forever and always') and verse 21 ('let all flesh bless his holy name forever and always') frames the psalm as a movement from personal to universal praise. David begins alone and ends with all creation. This is the last verse attributed to David in the Psalter; the five Halleluyah psalms that follow (146-150) are anonymous.

146

Summary: *The first of the five Final Hallel psalms (146-150) that close the entire Psalter. The psalm opens and closes with 'Halleluyah.' The psalmist commits to praising the LORD for the whole of his life, then issues a warning: do not put trust in human leaders — in princes or any mortal — because when their breath leaves them, they return to the ground and their plans die with them. In contrast, the one who is truly happy has the God of Jacob as his help. The psalm then catalogs what this God does: he made heaven and earth and sea, he keeps faith forever, he secures justice for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry, sets prisoners free, opens the eyes of the blind, lifts up the bowed down, loves the righteous, watches over the stranger, sustains the fatherless and the widow, and subverts the way of the wicked. The LORD reigns forever — your God, Zion, for all generations.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This psalm contains one of the Hebrew Bible's most comprehensive catalogs of divine action on behalf of the vulnerable. The list in verses 7-9 reads like a manifesto: justice for the oppressed, food for the hungry, freedom for prisoners, sight for the blind, dignity for the bent-over, love for the righteous, protection for the immigrant, support for the orphan and widow, and frustration of the wicked. When Jesus reads from Isaiah 61 in the Nazareth synagogue (Luke 4:18-19) and announces that the Scripture is fulfilled in their hearing, he is invoking precisely this tradition — the God who acts for the powerless. The psalm's warning against trusting princes (vv. 3-4) is not anti-political but theological: no human institution lasts, because every human dies. Only the God who made everything endures.*

Translation Friction: *The psalm is anonymous — part of the Final Hallel collection that carries no authorial attribution. The LXX (Septuagint) assigns it to Haggai and Zechariah, possibly reflecting a post-exilic liturgical setting. The sharp contrast between mortal princes and the eternal God raises the question of whether the psalm is critiquing specific political leaders or making a general theological point. The catalog of divine acts in verses 7-9 closely parallels Isaiah 61:1-3, and many scholars see literary dependence in one direction or the other.*

Connections: *The warning against trusting princes echoes Psalm 118:8-9 ('It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes'). The catalog of God's actions for the vulnerable connects to the Exodus narrative (liberation of the oppressed), the wilderness provision (food for the hungry), and the prophetic tradition (Isaiah 42:7, opening blind eyes; Isaiah 61:1, setting captives free). Jesus's beatitudes in Luke 6:20-23 and his answer to John the Baptist in Matthew 11:4-5 draw on the same tradition. The final declaration 'The LORD reigns forever' connects to the enthronement psalms (93, 96-99).*

1Halleluyah!

Praise the LORD, my soul.

2I will praise the LORD as long as I live.

I will sing to my God while I still have breath.

3Do not put your trust in princes,
in a human being, who cannot save.

4When his breath departs, he returns to his ground.
On that day his plans come to nothing.

⁵Happy is the one whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope rests on the LORD his God —

⁶the maker of heaven and earth,
the sea and everything in them —
the one who keeps faith forever,

⁷who secures justice for the oppressed,
who gives food to the hungry.
The LORD sets prisoners free.

⁸The LORD opens the eyes of the blind.
The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down.
The LORD loves the righteous.

⁹The LORD watches over the stranger.
He sustains the fatherless and the widow.
But the way of the wicked he twists to ruin.

¹⁰The LORD reigns forever —
your God, O Zion, for all generations.
Halleluyah!

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The psalm opens with halleluyah ('praise Yah') — the imperative hallelu directed to an unspecified audience, combined with Yah, the shortened form of YHVH. Then the psalmist turns inward: halleli nafshi et YHVH ('praise the LORD, my soul'). The movement from public summons to private address establishes the psalm's pattern: communal call, personal response.
2. The phrase be-chayyai ('in my life, while I live') and be-odi ('while I still exist, while I remain') commit the psalmist to lifelong praise. The two temporal markers are synonymous — the psalmist will praise until life ends. This sets up the contrast with verse 4: human breath eventually departs.
3. The nedivim ('princes, nobles, generous ones') represent the highest tier of human power. The parallel ben adam ('son of man, human being') reduces even the prince to his species: he is merely human. The phrase she-ein lo teshu'ah ('in whom there is no salvation/deliverance') is absolute — no human being possesses the capacity to save. The verb batlach ('to trust, to rely on') is redirected from humans to God.
4. The return to adamah ('ground') is a direct allusion to Genesis 3:19 ('for dust you are, and to dust you will return'). The word eshtonot ('plans, thoughts') occurs only here in the Hebrew Bible; its meaning is inferred from context and from the related Aramaic root. The 'that day' (ha-yom ha-hu) is the day of death — a single day undoes a lifetime of planning.
5. The beatitude ashre ('happy, blessed') contrasts with the warning of verses 3-4. The one whose hope (siver, 'expectation, hope') rests on YHVH Elohav ('the LORD his God') is blessed precisely because this God does not die, does not return to the ground, does not lose his plans. The title 'God of Jacob' recalls the patriarch who wrestled and was renamed — a God who engages with struggling, imperfect people.
6. The three-part creation formula — shamayim va-arets, ha-yam, ve-et kol asher bam ('heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them') — encompasses the totality of the created order. The God who made everything is the same God who shomer emet le-olam ('keeps faith/truth forever'). The word emet ('truth, faithfulness, reliability') stands in contrast to the eshtonot ('plans') of the prince that perish: God's commitments are permanent.
7. The catalog of divine action begins. Three acts in rapid succession: mishpat la-asuqim ('justice for the oppressed'), lechem la-re'evim ('bread for the hungry'), mattir asurim ('releasing the bound/imprisoned'). Each act addresses a different form of powerlessness: systemic injustice, physical deprivation, and captivity. The pattern moves from legal to material to physical liberation.
8. Jesus's healings of the blind (Mark 10:46-52, John 9) are understood in the gospel tradition as fulfillments of this and similar prophetic declarations. The triple YHVH creates a liturgical cadence — this is a creed being recited, each line beginning with the name of God.
9. The three most vulnerable categories in Israelite society — the ger ('stranger, resident alien'), the yatom ('fatherless, orphan'), and the almanah ('widow') — are singled out for God's protection. These are the three groups most frequently named together in Torah legislation (Deuteronomy 10:18, 24:17). The verb ye'odded ('he sustains, he supports, he encourages') describes active, ongoing care. The final line reverses the pattern: derekh resha'im ye'avvet ('the way of the wicked he makes crooked, he twists'). The God who straightens the bent-over (v. 8) bends the path of the wicked

into ruin.

10. The psalm closes with a declaration of eternal kingship: yimlokh YHVH le-olam ('the LORD will reign forever'). The address to Zion personalizes the declaration — this is not abstract theology but a message to a specific community. The closing halleluyah mirrors the opening, framing the psalm as an act of praise from beginning to end.

147

Summary: *The second of the Final Hallel psalms. This psalm celebrates the LORD as the one who rebuilds Jerusalem, gathers the exiles, heals the brokenhearted, and counts the stars by name. It moves between cosmic power and intimate care: the God who determines the number of the stars also binds up wounds. He provides rain for the earth, grass for the mountains, and food for the animals and the young ravens when they cry. He takes no pleasure in the strength of horses or in human legs — his delight is in those who fear him and who wait for his faithful love. The psalm calls Jerusalem and Zion to praise the LORD who has strengthened their gates, blessed their children, and established peace on their borders. He sends his word to the earth like snow and ice, then melts them with his wind. He has given his word (statutes and ordinances) to Jacob alone — no other nation knows his laws.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The psalm's most stunning feature is its refusal to separate cosmic power from personal tenderness. Verse 4 says God counts the stars and calls each one by name — an act of naming that echoes Genesis 1, where naming signifies authority and intimate knowledge. The very next verse says he heals the brokenhearted and binds their wounds. The God who numbers the galaxies also treats bruises. This oscillation between the immense and the intimate is the psalm's theological engine. The section on weather (vv. 15-18) treats God's word as a physical force: he sends it out and it runs across the earth; he speaks and the ice melts. The psalm makes no distinction between natural processes and divine speech — weather is God talking.*

Translation Friction: *The LXX (Septuagint) divides this psalm into two separate psalms: 146 (= MT vv. 1-11) and 147 (= MT vv. 12-20). The Masoretic Text treats it as one psalm. The statement in verse 20 that God has not done this for any other nation — lo asah khi le-khol goy — raises questions about universalism and particularism. The psalm's cosmic theology (God feeds the ravens, covers the sky with clouds) seems to apply to all creation, but the final verses restrict God's revealed law to Israel alone. The tension between universal providence and particular revelation is left unresolved.*

Connections: *The image of God counting and naming the stars appears also in Isaiah 40:26. The healing of the brokenhearted echoes Isaiah 61:1. The feeding of the ravens connects to Job 38:41 and to Jesus's teaching in Luke 12:24. The statement that God takes no pleasure in horses or human strength echoes Psalm 33:16-17 and challenges the military theology of the ancient Near East. The weather imagery in verses 15-18 parallels Job 37-38, where God's control of snow, ice, and wind is presented as evidence of his sovereignty.*

¹Halleluyah!

How good it is to sing to our God,
how pleasant — praise is fitting.

²The LORD is building up Jerusalem.
He gathers the scattered of Israel.

³He heals the brokenhearted
and binds up their wounds.

⁴He determines the number of the stars.
He calls each of them by name.

⁵Great is our Lord and vast in power.
His understanding has no limit.

⁶The LORD sustains the humble.
He brings the wicked down to the ground.

⁷Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving.
Make music to our God on the lyre.

⁸He covers the sky with clouds.
He prepares rain for the earth.
He makes grass grow on the mountains.

⁹He gives the animals their food
and the young ravens when they cry out.

¹⁰He does not delight in the strength of a horse.
He takes no pleasure in the legs of a warrior.

¹¹The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him,
in those who wait for his faithful love.

¹²Praise the LORD, Jerusalem!
Praise your God, Zion!

¹³For he has strengthened the bars of your gates.
He has blessed your children within you.

¹⁴He establishes peace on your borders.
He satisfies you with the finest wheat.

¹⁵He sends out his command to the earth.
His word runs swiftly.

¹⁶He gives snow like wool.
He scatters frost like ashes.

¹⁷He hurls his ice like crumbs.
Who can withstand his cold?

¹⁸He sends out his word and melts them.
He blows his wind and the waters flow.

¹⁹He declares his word to Jacob,
his statutes and judgments to Israel.

²⁰He has not done this for any other nation.
They do not know his judgments.
Halleluyah!

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The opening halleluyah is followed by a reason: *ki tov* ('for it is good'). The verb *zammerah* ('to make music, to sing psalms') is directed to *Eloheanu* ('our God') — the first-person plural claims communal ownership. The word *na'im* ('pleasant, lovely, delightful') and *navah* ('fitting, beautiful, appropriate') describe praise not as duty but as something that is both enjoyable and aesthetically right.

2. The participle *boneh* ('building, one who builds') indicates ongoing action — the LORD is in the process of rebuilding. The *nidche Yisrael* ('the scattered/expelled ones of Israel') are the exiles, the dispersed community. The verse likely reflects a post-exilic setting where Jerusalem is being physically rebuilt and the diaspora is being regathered.
3. The *ha-rofe* ('the healer') is a participle describing God's ongoing activity. The *shevure lev* ('broken of heart') are those whose inner life has been shattered — by exile, grief, loss, or betrayal. The verb *mechabesh* ('binding up, bandaging') is a medical term applied to emotional and spiritual injury. God is physician to wounds that no human doctor can reach.
4. The image of God naming the stars appears also in Isaiah 40:26, where the prophet says God 'brings out their host by number, calling them all by name.' The connection between numbering and naming suggests a census: God takes roll call of the stars, and none is absent.
5. The phrase *rav koach* ('great in power, vast in strength') and *litevunato ein mispar* ('to his understanding there is no number') create an ironic echo of verse 4: God can number the stars, but his own understanding cannot be numbered. The one who counts everything is himself uncountable.
6. The *me'odded* ('sustaining, encouraging, supporting') describes ongoing divine care for the *anavim* ('humble, afflicted, meek'). The contrast with the wicked uses the verb *mashpil* ('brings low, humbles, casts down') — the same vertical reversal seen throughout the Psalter: God lifts the low and lowers the high.
7. The verb *enu* ('sing, respond, answer') introduces a new section of the psalm. The *todah* ('thanksgiving, acknowledgment, confession of praise') is both a genre of worship and a sacrifice (the *todah* offering). The *kinnor* ('lyre') is David's instrument, the foundational instrument of Israelite worship.
8. Three participles describe God's atmospheric work: *mekhasseh* ('covering'), *mekhin* ('preparing, establishing'), *matsmyach* ('making grow, causing to sprout'). The sequence traces the rain cycle: clouds cover the sky, rain falls on the earth, grass grows on the mountains. What meteorology describes as a water cycle, the psalm describes as divine action.
9. The *behemah* ('livestock, animals, beasts') and the *bene orev* ('young ravens, raven chicks') represent the breadth of God's provision — from domesticated animals to wild scavengers. The ravens' cry (*yiqra'u*, 'they call out') is treated as a prayer that God answers. This image appears in Job 38:41 and in Jesus's teaching in Luke 12:24.
10. The horse (*sus*) was the primary instrument of military superiority in the ancient Near East. Egypt was the major supplier of warhorses, and Israel's kings were repeatedly warned against multiplying horses (Deuteronomy 17:16). The pairing of horse-strength with human-leg-strength dismisses both cavalry and infantry as objects of divine approval.
11. The contrast with verse 10 is complete: God delights not in military power but in *yere'av* ('those who fear him') and *ha-meyachalim le-chasdo* ('those who wait/hope for his faithful love'). The verb *yachal* ('to wait, to hope') describes patient expectation — not passive resignation but active trust directed toward *chesed*. God's pleasure is in the posture of dependent trust, not in the posture of self-sufficient power.
12. The psalm's second major section begins with a direct address to Jerusalem and Zion — the city and its sacred hill. The imperatives *shabbechi* ('praise!') and *hallelu* ('praise!') call the city itself to worship. In the LXX, this is where a new psalm (147) begins.
13. The *berichei she'arayikh* ('bars of your gates') are the heavy crossbeams that secured the city gates — the primary defense against invasion. God has made them strong. The parallel *berakh banayikh* ('he has blessed your children') moves from external security to internal flourishing. The city is both fortified and fertile.
14. The *ha-sam gevulekh shalom* ('the one who sets your border as peace') declares that God himself is the agent of peace at the borders — no enemy penetrates. The *chelev chittim* ('fat of wheat, finest wheat') represents the best of the grain harvest. The word *chelev* ('fat') is the choicest portion, the part offered to God in sacrifice. Now God gives the best back to the city.
15. The *ha-sholeach imrato arets* ('the one who sends his word/saying to the earth') personifies God's word as a messenger dispatched on a mission. The verb *yaruts* ('it runs') gives the word legs — it races across the landscape. The speed (*ad meherah*, 'up to swiftness, very fast') emphasizes that God's word encounters no resistance between intention and execution.
16. The similes are striking: snow like wool (*ka-tsamer*) — white, thick, blanketing the ground; frost like ashes (*ka-efer*) — pale, fine, dusting every surface. Both comparisons emphasize the covering quality of winter precipitation. The weather is not random but given (*noten*) and scattered (*yefazzer*) by God.
17. The verb *mashlik* ('he hurls, he throws') is violent — God does not gently lower the ice but flings it. The *qarchoh ke-fittim* ('his ice like crumbs/morsels') pictures hailstones or chunks of ice scattered like broken bread. The rhetorical question *lifne qarato mi ya'amod* ('before his cold, who can stand?') acknowledges that cold — a simple weather phenomenon — is an irresistible force of divine origin.
18. The same *devaro* ('his word') that ran swiftly in verse 15 now melts the ice and snow of verses 16-17. The verb *yamsem* ('he melts them') shows the word as a warming force. The *rucho* ('his wind/spirit') — the same word for spirit and wind — blows and the frozen waters flow again. The cycle is complete: God sends cold and then sends warmth; he freezes and then thaws. All of it is his word at work.
19. The psalm shifts from God's word in nature (weather) to God's word in revelation (Torah). The *maggid devarav le-Ya'aqov* ('he declares his words to Jacob') uses the same verb for proclaiming that appeared in verse 15 for dispatching. The *chuqqav u-mishpatav* ('his statutes and his judgments') are the specific legal and moral instructions given to Israel — the Torah.

- 20.** The final verse makes an exclusivity claim: *lo asah khi le-khol goy* ('he has not done so for any nation'). The revelation of Torah is unique to Israel. While God's providential care extends to all creation (vv. 8-9), his revealed will — his statutes and judgments — has been given to one people. The closing halleluyah seals the psalm's movement from cosmic praise to particular gratitude for Torah.

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Summary: *The third of the Final Hallel psalms. This is the great cosmic praise psalm: a sweeping summons for all creation — from the highest heavens to the deepest sea — to praise the LORD. The psalm moves from the heights downward: angels, heavenly hosts, sun, moon, stars, the highest heavens, the waters above the sky. Then it descends to earth: sea creatures, ocean depths, fire, hail, snow, mist, storm wind, mountains, hills, fruit trees, cedars, wild animals, cattle, creeping things, birds. Finally it reaches humanity: kings, peoples, princes, rulers, young men, young women, the old, the young. Everything that exists is summoned to praise the LORD, whose name alone is exalted, whose splendor covers earth and heaven, and who has raised up a horn for his people.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 148 is the most comprehensive creation-praise text in the Hebrew Bible. Its structure mirrors the creation sequence of Genesis 1 in reverse: it begins in the heavens and works downward through the sky, the atmosphere, the land, and finally the human world. But unlike Genesis 1, the creation here is not passive — it is summoned to active praise. The sun, moon, and stars are not merely objects; they are worshipers. The sea creatures and storm winds are not merely phenomena; they are members of a choir. The psalm insists that praise is not a human activity extended to creation by metaphor but a cosmic activity in which humans participate. The universe is a temple, and everything in it is liturgy.*

Translation Friction: *The psalm raises the question of how non-sentient entities 'praise' God. The mountains, the hail, and the sea creatures are commanded to praise, but they cannot speak or think. Some interpreters read this as poetic hyperbole; others (following the psalm's own logic) argue that existence itself is praise — that by being what they are and doing what they were made to do, all created things glorify their maker. Romans 8:19-22, where creation groans in anticipation, and Revelation 5:13, where every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth praises the Lamb, extend this theology. The 'horn' raised for God's people in verse 14 is a compressed royal/messianic image whose referent is debated.*

Connections: *The psalm is closely related to the Song of the Three Young Men (an addition to Daniel 3 in the LXX), which uses the same pattern of summoning all creation to praise. The list of created entities echoes Genesis 1 and Job 38-41. Francis of Assisi's 'Canticle of the Sun' is a medieval Christian expansion of this psalm's theology. The horn (*qeren*) raised for God's people in verse 14 connects to the messianic 'horn of David' in Psalm 132:17 and to Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:69: 'He has raised up a horn of salvation for us').*

1Halleluyah!

Praise the LORD from the heavens.

Praise him in the heights.

2Praise him, all his angels.

Praise him, all his heavenly armies.

3Praise him, sun and moon.

Praise him, all you stars of light.

4Praise him, highest heavens,

and you waters above the sky.

5Let them praise the name of the LORD,

for at his command and they were created.

⁶He set them in place forever.
 He gave a decree that will not pass away.

⁷Praise the LORD from the earth,
 you sea creatures and all ocean depths.

⁸Fire and hail, snow and mist,
 storm wind that carries out his word,

⁹mountains and all hills,
 fruit trees and all cedars,

¹⁰wild animals and all livestock,
 creeping things and birds in flight,

¹¹kings of the earth and all peoples,
 princes and all rulers of the earth,

¹²young men and young women,
 old and young together.

¹³Let them praise the name of the LORD,
 for his name alone is exalted.
 His splendor covers earth and heaven.

¹⁴He has raised up a horn for his people —
 praise for all his faithful ones,
 for the children of Israel, a people close to him.
 Halleluyah!

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The psalm opens at the highest point of creation: min ha-shamayim ('from the heavens') and ba-meromim ('in the heights'). The praise is to originate at the top of the cosmos and cascade downward. The triple hallelu in this verse sets the relentless pace of the entire psalm — command after command, summoning layer after layer of creation.
2. The mal'akhav ('his angels, his messengers') and tseva'av ('his hosts, his armies') are the members of the divine court — the heavenly beings who serve the LORD. The word tsava ('host, army') is military language applied to the celestial realm: the stars and angelic beings are God's organized forces.
3. The sun (shemesh) and moon (yareach) are addressed directly, as though they can hear. The kokheve or ('stars of light') are not merely luminous objects but praised participants. In the ancient Near East, sun and moon were deities worshiped by surrounding cultures. This psalm commands them to worship the LORD — they are not gods but creatures summoned to praise their maker.
4. The sheme ha-shamayim ('heavens of the heavens') is the superlative — the highest conceivable point of the cosmos. The mayim asher me'al ha-shamayim ('the waters that are above the heavens') reflects the cosmology of Genesis 1:7, where God separated the waters below the firmament from the waters above it. Even these primal, pre-creation waters are summoned to praise.
5. The reason for praise is creation itself: ki hu tsivvah ve-nivra'u ('for he commanded and they were created'). The verb nivra'u ('they were created') is the Niphal of bara, the verb reserved in Genesis 1 for divine creation. Everything that exists does so because God spoke it into being. Existence is the first and fundamental reason for praise.
6. The verb ya'amidem ('he caused them to stand, he established them') describes permanent placement — the heavenly bodies are fixed in their courses. The choq natan ('he gave a statute/decreed') applies legal language to the natural order: the stars obey a law, a binding ordinance. The phrase lo ya'avur ('it will not pass, it will not be transgressed') declares the permanence of God's cosmic legislation.
7. The psalm pivots from heaven to earth: min ha-arets ('from the earth'). The tanninim ('sea creatures, sea monsters, great serpents') are the largest and most fearsome creatures of the deep — in other contexts (Isaiah 27:1, Job 41) they represent chaos. Here they are not enemies to be conquered but worshipers summoned to praise. The tehomot ('deep waters, ocean depths, abysses') are the primordial deeps of Genesis 1:2.

8. The weather phenomena — *esh* ('fire/lightning'), *barad* ('hail'), *sheleg* ('snow'), *qitor* ('mist, vapor, smoke'), *ruach se'arah* ('storm wind') — are presented as obedient agents. The final phrase *osah devaro* ('doing his word, carrying out his command') declares that the storm wind is not chaotic but obedient: it executes God's instructions. Weather is divine speech in motion.
9. The landscape joins the chorus: mountains and hills for topography, fruit trees and cedars for vegetation. The *ets peri* ('fruit tree') represents cultivated, productive growth; the *arazim* ('cedars') represent wild, majestic growth. Both cultivated and wild nature are summoned.
10. The animal kingdom is represented in four categories: *chayyah* ('wild animal, living creature'), *behemah* ('livestock, domestic animal'), *remes* ('creeping thing, swarming creature'), and *tsippor kanaf* ('bird of wing, winged bird'). These categories echo the creation taxonomy of Genesis 1:24-26. The entire animal world, from the largest predator to the smallest crawler, is called to praise.
11. The human realm is summoned by social rank: *malke erets* ('kings of the earth') at the top, *leummim* ('peoples, nations') as the collective, *sarim* ('princes, officials') as the governing class, and *shofete erets* ('judges/rulers of the earth') as the judiciary. No tier of human power is exempt from the summons to praise.
12. The summons moves from political rank to demographic range: *bachurim* ('young men'), *betulot* ('young women, maidens'), *zeqenim* ('old, elders'), and *ne'arim* ('youth, children'). Every age and both sexes are included. The word *im* ('with, together') in *zeqenim im ne'arim* ('old with young') emphasizes that praise unites generations.
13. The verb *nisgav* ('is exalted, is set on high, is inaccessibly high') declares God's name to be in a category beyond all other names. The word *levaddo* ('alone, by itself') insists on uniqueness: no other name shares this height. The *hodo* ('his splendor, his majesty') covers both *erets ve-shamayim* ('earth and heaven') — the same two realms that were separately summoned to praise now share in displaying God's glory.
14. The *qeren* ('horn') is variously interpreted as the Davidic king, the nation of Israel collectively, or the messianic hope. Luke 1:69 applies the image to Jesus: 'He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.' The phrase *am qerovo* ('a people close to him') is unique and expresses election as proximity rather than privilege.

149

Summary: *The fourth of the Final Hallel psalms. A new song for the LORD: Israel is called to celebrate its Maker with dancing and music — tambourine and lyre. The LORD takes delight in his people and adorns the humble with victory. The faithful ones are to shout for joy from their beds, with praise on their lips and a double-edged sword in their hands, to carry out judgment on the nations, to bind their kings with chains, to execute the written verdict. This honor belongs to all his faithful ones.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This psalm holds together two things that later interpreters have struggled to combine: ecstatic worship and military action. The faithful ones have praise of God in their mouths and a two-edged sword in their hands simultaneously (v. 6). The psalm does not sequence these — first worship, then war, or first war, then worship — but holds them together as a single act. The verb *ye'alzu* ('let them exult') in verse 5 pictures the faithful shouting for joy on their beds — perhaps a reference to nighttime worship or to the confidence of those who can sleep soundly because victory is assured. The 'written verdict' (*mishpat katuv*) of verse 9 suggests that the judgment on the nations is not arbitrary but follows a pre-existing divine sentence.*

Translation Friction: *The militaristic language of verses 6-9 — swords, vengeance, chains, iron shackles — has troubled interpreters across centuries. Is this literal military conquest, eschatological judgment, or spiritual metaphor? Jewish tradition has read the 'double-edged sword' as Torah study (the sword of the mouth), while Christian tradition has oscillated between crusade theology and purely spiritual readings. The psalm offers no internal signals that the language is metaphorical; it reads as a celebration of God's people as agents of divine justice against hostile nations. The phrase *mishpat katuv* ('written judgment') in verse 9 may refer to prophetic oracles against the nations (Isaiah 13-23, Jeremiah 46-51) or to a heavenly decree.*

Connections: *The 'new song' (*shir chadash*) connects to Psalms 33:3, 96:1, 98:1, and 144:9 — each marks a fresh act of God that demands fresh praise. The double-edged sword (*cherev pifiyyot*) appears in Revelation 1:16 and Hebrews 4:12, where it is identified with the word of God. The binding of kings and nobles (v. 8) echoes Psalm 2:1-3, where the nations conspire against the LORD and his anointed. The 'honor for all his faithful ones' (v. 9) distributes royal dignity to the entire community, a democratization of the royal psalms' theology.*

¹Halleluyah!

Sing to the LORD a new song,
his praise in the assembly of the faithful.

²Let Israel celebrate its Maker.
Let the children of Zion rejoice in their King.

³Let them praise his name with dancing,
with tambourine and lyre making music to him.

⁴For the LORD takes delight in his people.
He adorns the humble with victory.

⁵Let the faithful ones exult in glory.
Let them shout for joy on their beds.

⁶The praises of God are in their throats
and a double-edged sword in their hands,

⁷to carry out vengeance on the nations,
punishment on the peoples,

⁸to bind their kings with chains
and their nobles with iron shackles,

⁹to carry out the verdict written against them.
This is the honor given to all his faithful ones.
Halleluyah!

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The shir chadash ('new song') signals fresh praise prompted by fresh divine action. The qahal chasidim ('assembly of the faithful, congregation of the devoted ones') locates this praise in communal worship, not private devotion. The chasidim are those marked by chesed — people whose lives reflect the covenant loyalty they receive from God.
2. The parallel Yisrael / bene Tsiyyon ('Israel / children of Zion') names the people as both nation and city-community. The osaiv ('his Maker, the one who made him') identifies God not merely as ruler but as creator of the nation. The malkam ('their King') is God himself — the psalm's theology of divine kingship is direct and unmediated.
3. The machol ('dance, circle dance') brings the body into worship — praise is not only vocal but physical. The tof ('tambourine, hand drum') and kinnor ('lyre') provide the instrumental accompaniment. The combination of dance and music evokes the celebrations after the Red Sea crossing (Exodus 15:20), where Miriam led the women with tambourines and dancing.
4. The verb rotseh ('takes pleasure, delights in, is pleased with') echoes Psalm 147:11. The verb yefa'er ('he adorns, he beautifies, he glorifies') pictures God dressing the anavim ('humble, afflicted, meek') in yeshu'ah ('salvation, victory, deliverance') as though it were a garment or a crown. The humble are not merely rescued but made beautiful by God's saving action.
5. The ya'lezu ('let them exult, let them triumph') describes the uninhibited joy of the chasidim. The phrase al mishkevotam ('on their beds') has generated varied interpretations: nighttime praise before sleep, the confidence of those who can rest securely knowing God fights for them, or the joy that persists even in the private space of one's own bedroom. The image is of praise so thorough it follows the worshiper into bed.
6. The cherev pifiyyot ('sword of edges/mouths') is literally 'a sword of double mouths.' The word peh ('mouth') is used for the cutting edge of a blade because the blade 'bites' like a mouth. A double-edged sword has two cutting surfaces, making it effective on both the forward and return stroke.
7. The neqamah ('vengeance, retribution, vindication') is not personal revenge but the execution of divine justice. The tokhehot ('punishments, rebukes, corrections') are judicial in character — these are sentences being carried out. The nations (goyim) and peoples (leummim) who receive this judgment are those who have opposed God and his people.

8. The binding of malkheihem ('their kings') and nikhbedeihem ('their honored ones, their nobles') reverses the power structure: those who held authority are now held in chains. The ziqqim ('chains') and khavle varzel ('iron shackles, iron fetters') are the instruments of captivity. The image is of total military and political subjugation.
9. The mishpat katuv ('written judgment, recorded verdict') suggests a pre-existing divine sentence — the judgment is not improvised but follows a decree already inscribed. The hadar hu le-khol chasidav ('this is the honor/glory for all his faithful ones') declares that participation in divine justice is not restricted to kings or warriors but belongs to the entire community of the faithful. The closing halleluyah frames even this militant passage within the context of praise.

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Summary: *The final psalm of the Psalter — the fifth and last of the Final Hallel psalms. This is the conclusion of the entire book of Psalms. Every line is a command to praise. The psalm answers three questions: Where should God be praised? In his sanctuary and in his mighty heavens. Why should God be praised? For his mighty acts and his surpassing greatness. How should God be praised? With trumpet, harp, lyre, tambourine, dancing, strings, pipe, and crashing cymbals. The final verse expands the summons beyond instruments and beyond Israel: 'Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.' The last word of the Psalter is Halleluyah.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Psalm 150 is the Psalter's final word, and that word is praise. The book that began with the quiet happiness of the righteous individual (Psalm 1:1, 'Happy is the one') and passed through every human experience — lament, anger, despair, confession, thanksgiving, wonder, terror, exile, and return — ends with nothing but praise. Every verse is an imperative: hallelu, hallelu, hallelu. There are no requests, no complaints, no enemies, no conditions. The psalm strips worship down to its purest form: an unbroken cascade of commands to praise, each one adding a new instrument to the orchestra. The final verse — kol ha-neshamah tehallel Yah ('let everything that has breath praise the LORD') — is the widest possible summons. The word neshamah ('breath') is the breath God breathed into the first human in Genesis 2:7. Every creature that received that breath owes it back as praise. The Psalter ends where creation began: with divine breath, now returned to its source as worship.*

Translation Friction: *The psalm's relentless imperative mood and absence of any content beyond 'praise' has led some scholars to view it as liturgically thin — all form and no substance. But this misses the structural argument: the substance of the Psalter is the preceding 149 psalms. Psalm 150 is not a standalone poem but a doxology for the entire collection. The five Final Hallel psalms (146-150) correspond structurally to the five books of the Psalter (1-41, 42-72, 73-89, 90-106, 107-150), each of which ends with a doxology. Psalm 150 is the doxology of doxologies — the final 'Amen' of the entire five-book structure.*

Connections: *The opening phrase 'Praise God in his sanctuary' connects to the entire temple theology of the Psalter (Psalms 27:4, 84:1-4, 134:1). The instruments listed correspond to those used in temple worship as described in 1 Chronicles 15:16-28 and 2 Chronicles 5:12-13. The final verse — 'let everything that has breath praise the LORD' — is the ultimate fulfillment of Psalm 145:21 ('let all flesh bless his holy name') and of Psalm 148's summons of all creation. The structure of the Psalter moves from Torah (Psalm 1) to praise (Psalm 150), suggesting that the life shaped by God's instruction naturally culminates in worship.*

¹Halleluyah!

Praise God in his sanctuary.

Praise him in his mighty heavens.

²Praise him for his mighty acts.

Praise him according to his surpassing greatness.

³Praise him with the blast of the ram's horn.

Praise him with harp and lyre.

4Praise him with tambourine and dancing.
Praise him with strings and pipe.

5Praise him with resounding cymbals.
Praise him with crashing cymbals.

6Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.
Halleluyah!

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The *reqi'a uzzo* ('firmament of his strength') echoes Genesis 1:6 but adds the qualifier *uzzo* ('his strength, his power'). The heavens are not merely an expanse but a display of divine power. The parallelism between sanctuary and firmament suggests that the earthly temple is a microcosm of the heavenly space — worship below mirrors worship above.
2. The psalm now answers why: *bi-gevurotav* ('for his mighty acts') — everything God has done. *Ke-rov gudlo* ('according to the abundance of his greatness') — because of who God is. The two reasons cover the entire ground of praise: God's deeds (what he has done) and God's nature (what he is). The word *rov* ('abundance, greatness, multitude') indicates that God's greatness exceeds any attempt to match it with praise — and yet the psalm commands the attempt.
3. The psalm now answers how, and the answer is: with everything. The *teqa shofar* ('blast of the ram's horn') is the sound of assembly, alarm, and holy celebration — the shofar that sounded at Sinai (Exodus 19:16) and at the fall of Jericho (Joshua 6:20). The *nevel* ('harp') and *kinnor* ('lyre') are the foundational stringed instruments of Israelite worship.
4. The *tof* ('tambourine, hand drum') and *machol* ('dancing, circle dance') add percussion and movement. The *minnim* ('strings, stringed instruments') is a general term for string instruments, and the *ugav* ('pipe, flute, wind instrument') adds breath-powered sound. The progression moves through the instrument families: brass (*shofar*), strings (*harp*, *lyre*, *minnim*), percussion (*tambourine*), wind (*pipe*), and movement (*dancing*).
5. The *tsiltselei shama* ('cymbals of hearing/sound') and *tsiltselei teru'ah* ('cymbals of shouting/crashing') represent two types or intensities of cymbal sound. The first may be smaller finger-cymbals that keep rhythm; the second is the large crash-cymbals that punctuate climactic moments. The word *teru'ah* ('shout, blast, alarm, acclamation') brings the sound to its peak — this is worship at full volume, holding nothing back.
6. The *neshamah* ('breath, living breath') is distinguished from *ruach* ('spirit, wind') — *neshamah* is specifically the breath of life, the respiratory function that sustains creatures. Its use here connects the end of the Psalter to the beginning of Genesis: God breathed the *neshamah* into the first human, and now every being that carries it is summoned to return it as praise. The closing *halleluyah* is the 150th psalm's final syllable and the Psalter's final word.